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THE
STORY OF THE
WANDERER





1



THE
STORY OF THE WANDERER,

A SCRIPTURAL ALLEGORY,

SHOWING

HOW HE LEFT HIS HOME,
HOW HE SOJOURNED IN THE CITY OF EARTHLY-DELIGHT,
HOW HE TRADED IN THE TOWN OF MANSMERIT,
HOW HE FARED IN THE FAR COUNTRY,
AND HOW HE RETURNED.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "DOWN IN DINGYSHIRE"

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS.



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P R E F A C E .

An endeavour to present Divine truth under a figurative form needs no apology, for it has the sanction of Divine precedent. Nevertheless, some few words may not be altogether uncalled for, as a preface to the present work. For any allegory, which sets forth a spiritual history under the emblem of a journey, necessarily seems to occupy ground already sufficiently occupied by the *Pilgrim's Progress*; and its author is consequently bound to attempt to justify his presumption.

The writer would therefore venture to point out, in the first place, that John Bunyan's inimitable parable—inimitable both in design and execution—does not exhaust the earthly history of the believer. It brings before its readers, with marvellous power, and with a profound knowledge both of the word of God and of the human heart, the heavenward struggles of the converted sinner. But it hardly touches upon that portion of the history of the redeemed soul which precedes its reception of a lively faith.

And further. Holy Scripture only indirectly sets forth the life of the Christian under the emblem of a pilgrimage; whereas it brings before us continually,

and under many forms, the idea of a child who, having wandered away from the home of a Father's love, is by His grace brought back again. This idea everywhere underlies the sacred record of God's dealings with His covenant Israel; it comes conspicuously forward in the threefold parable of the strayed sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son.

The pages which succeed this are therefore meant to be regarded as an attempt to expand this idea, with especial reference to the last of the similitudes just mentioned; and not as in any way presuming to compete — however inefficiently — with the *Pilgrim's Progress*. They seem to the writer to travel altogether upon other lines, and if in any way they are connected with that precious parable, to have only a supplementary or prefatory connection.

May the Author of the Divine framework, in which an imperfect human picture is thus set, bless its teachings, to the glory of His name and the extension of His kingdom !

THE
STORY OF THE WANDERER.

CHAP. I.

INCONSTANT'S EDUCATION, HOME, AND FRIENDS.

As you go down from the heights of Celestial Glory, and draw near to Humanity Plains, you cannot fail to observe the renowned mansion of Zion Towers. The house itself is four-square, built upon twelve foundations, which are joined into one single corner-stone. Its very stones are precious, and of a rich sardine colour, picked out by the builder one by one, and from many quarters. It has upper and lower chambers, court-yards refreshed by perpetual fountains, a banqueting-room hung with banners, store-rooms filled with provisions, resting-places in quiet recesses for the weary, and a library of the choicest for the studious. Upon the front of the building shine the early rays of the morning sun, and its hinder windows look up the moun-

tain. All around are fertile and spreading meadows, watered by pleasant streams, and pastured by innumerable flocks of sheep. In that and this direction may be seen folds wherein the sheep may lie, but all within sight and sound of the shepherd's homestead. A garden enclosed encircles the house; and therein, by reason that it lies in a south land, sloping to a warm sun, and sheltered to the rear by the lofty mountains of Grace (at the foot of which the mansion itself stands), all manner of lovely flowers abound, as also sweet-scented herbs and delicate-tasted fruits. Very pleasant is it to wander through this garden, and various and enchanting is the prospect thence. On the one side you may behold Humanity Plains, dotted with populous cities, and alive with a perpetual activity. On the other side, you are refreshed by the quiet beauty of the solemn hills, and sometimes (when the wind is southerly) you may even catch a distant glimpse—far away—of the heights of Celestial Glory. Beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth, is Zion Towers. The mountains stand around her, and under her is the Rock of Ages.

In this mansion of Zion Towers dwelt one while the two sons of its owner, under the care of certain appointed guardians. It may perchance occasion some surprise that so magnificent a mansion, not to speak of the children themselves, should thus be left to the care of deputed stewards, however able and trustworthy. But grave reasons exist for the course adopted, and without enquiring into these, it is

sufficient here to observe that Zion Towers is but one of its Owner's innumerable possessions, and that a perfect code of rules for ordinary use, as well as a system of rapid communication with the Master of the domain, enable His will on all occasions to be at once ascertained.

The characters of the brothers thus dwelling in Zion Towers were entirely unlike. Fairseeming, who was by some years the oldest, had been sent by his guardians to the famous academy of Dr. Prudence, in the town of Mansmerit, and thence had proceeded to the collége of St. Severus. Throughout all his educational courses, whether at school or college, his conduct had been without stain, nor was he slow to remember this, and ever and anon to speak of it openly. The great advantages which he had thus enjoyed in his early life had also qualified him to hold expert disputations, and to propound correct opinions on all subjects with a scrupulous exactitude. Nor was he behindhand in the matters of common life. He had a pretty turn for building, and a good eye for land and cattle. His foresight had already extended the property some distance into Humanity Plains, and he had succeeded in producing a cross-breed between the sheep and the goat which had been much admired by competent judges, and of which he was naturally proud. The tenants of the estate therefore regarded this young gentleman with a favourable eye, and were not unwilling, in the case of one so practical, to pardon a certain absence of the warmer affections, and an occasional harshness of manner. The servants also, to whom he was by

no means indulgent, yet respected his industrious habits and keen understanding, and felt themselves safe in trusting to his integrity. He also unquestionably enjoyed his Father's affection, and by Him—although his faults were fully known—was entrusted with many weighty and important businesses, and in everything regarded with a tender love. Thus, had it not been for one exception, it might have been said of young Fairseeming, that all men spoke well of him.

The one exception was his own brother Inconstant, who unhappily regarded Fairseeming with an unbrotherly dislike. Inconstant's career had been singularly and sadly different from that of his elder brother. Dr. Prudence, to whom the younger brother had also been sent by his guardians in his early days, had expressed the greatest fears with respect to him; and, in this opinion of the worthy doctor, the classical teacher at his academy, Mr. Pharisee, had cordially concurred. Mr. Sadducee likewise, the mathematical and scientific instructor, although differing from his comrade on most subjects, agreed with him on this. Whence it fell out that, after no small exhortation and much bodily chastisement, young Inconstant was finally dismissed, with no better recommendation than the expression of a hope that, as he might grow older, so he might also become wiser.

This hope seemed unlikely to be fulfilled. After his expulsion by Dr. Prudence, the youth could not be induced to attend upon any other instructor. The institution pre-

sided over by Mr. Self-love has great popularity in those parts, and receives a large number of scholars; Mr. Self-love being reputed to be a skilful master and of conciliatory manners. Dr. Intellect's school, and the seminary of Professor Self-respect, are also in that neighbourhood, and although not so large as that already mentioned, yet have excellent reputations. But to none of these educational institutions could the careless lad, now rising into manhood, be persuaded to betake himself; and, unhappily for himself, he was now of an age when any attempt to compel him by force was not to be enterprised. At home, therefore, did he remain, open to all the temptations of idleness, the object of his brother Fairseeming's contempt, a source of anxiety to his best friends, and the opposite of a happiness to himself.

Yet was there much about this young man's character that was attractive, and hopeful of better things. His temper was genial, his spirit was lively, his intention was generous and honest, and his courage unquestionable. He was able to do a kind action (now and then), and would occasionally confess himself in the wrong. But all these qualities were rendered useless by a love of carnal pleasures and a distaste for honest labour. And his destruction, thus commenced, was completed by three villains whom he called his friends.

These three friends were named Ignorance, Lust, and Indolence.

Ignorance was an ill-favoured fellow, and in his nature

suspicious and passionate. It is difficult, indeed, to understand the arts by which a youth of noble lineage, bred up in the stately household of Zion Towers, and accustomed from early youth to wise and gracious society, could be gained over by so mean a person as Ignorance. But although so carefully nurtured, young Inconstant had never used his excellent opportunities rightly. The rich library of his Father's mansion spread its treasures before him in vain; the exhortation of the elder and more grave of the household was lost upon his sluggish habit; the management and occupations of the great estate, in which his talents and time might have been worthily employed, had no charms for him; the conversations of the wise and good men, who from time to time visited his home, only filled him with weariness. Hence, step by step, he descended from the lofty position to which by his birth he was entitled, and became a prey to the low and cunning arts of the mere vulgar reprobate, which his friend Ignorance really was.

Lust was a better-looking person, and somewhat older also, than Ignorance. His complexion was fair and ruddy, his limbs were well-formed, and his features handsome, his temper was agreeable, and his countenance smiling. But most dangerous of all dangerous friends was he. Under a mask of openness, he concealed a diabolical cunning. Though his words were smother than oil, yet was the end thereof bitter as wormwood, and deadly as the grave. His talk was of the wine-cup, of strange women, of sensuous

feasts and entertainments, and of the various pleasures (for so he called them) of the world and the flesh. Of the terrible destruction in which these things have their ending, he said nothing. Nor was he without a fearful experience in the art of ruin. Through him the wisest man in Humanity Plains had beforetime fallen ; and how, therefore, could poor Inconstant hope to fare ?

Notwithstanding all this, Inconstant made Lust his familiar friend, and day by day advanced in affection towards him. Nay, not content with his ordinary companionship abroad, he obtained a pass-key into his own private chamber, and gave it to his friend, so that he might have access to him at all times. Through this last folly, no doubt, the ruin of the young man was mainly hastened. There were times when, not yet dead to the stings of remorse, and being removed from outward temptations in the silence of his own chamber, Inconstant would be for throwing himself on his knees, and beseeching pardon for the past, and strength for the future. But ever, before he could accomplish his intention, the pass-key of Lust might be heard turning in the lock, and the tempter himself came in, smiling his hellish smile, and killing with it every pure and noble thought.

Finally, the affection of Inconstant for Lust and Ignorance was not so complete as that wherewith he regarded Indolence. Of the two former friends he was sometimes wearied, occasionally afraid, and more often ashamed ; but from Indolence he was never of his own accord parted,

save during the hours of sleep. Without asking the opinion of this bosom-friend, he undertook no occupation ; and, at the end of every task, however slight, he sought refuge in his arms. A sleepy-eyed lad was Indolence, with thickish lips and sinewless arms, very careful of his body, and hardly the sort of companion which an active young man would seem likely to choose. Yet for all that, Inconstant had so chosen him, and much to his own loss. Some have said that Indolence was not so dangerous, because he never counselled any active wrong. But, alas ! neither did he counsel any good, nor in any way resist the flood of evil ; and, furthermore, by his constant companionship, he kept Inconstant from more worthy friendships.

These three, then, did the younger son of Zion Towers foolishly regard as his friends. Had he known them truly, he would have given them a different name. Unknown to him, they were sworn together for his destruction.

CHAP. II.

INCONSTANT'S FRIENDS PLOT HIS DESTRUCTION.

The custom of the four young men just described was to meet towards the close of each day. They could then most easily engage in the riotous and profligate pleasures which they enjoyed, and then also could most easily lay their plans for similar delights in the future. It was on such an occasion of meeting, and when Inconstant only had not yet joined the party, that the following conversation took place. Indolence commenced it.

"The day is far gone, comrades, and Inconstant comes not. Methinks I shall get me home again, for I am weary waiting upon this young idler's pleasure."

"Thou art soon wearied, Master Indolence," answered Lust, "dost thou not perceive how greatly to thy advantage will be the plan which we are now upon, and how much thou wilt lose, should this young fool come to the meeting-place, and find us departed?"

"Well, well," rejoined Indolence, somewhat nettled, "I will tarry awhile. But thou art mistaken in supposing

that I understand not my own advantage. I know my business well enough, though I make less noise about it than some."

"Of what matter do ye speak?" enquired Ignorance; "I confess I understand not the particulars of the plan proposed, if it be of that plan that you are talking."

"As the story is somewhat long," said Indolence, yawning, "let friend Lust, who seemingly is not soon weary, declare it."

"For my part, I am content to do so," replied Lust. "No one has ever laid to my charge slothfulness in compassing my ends; and if a more certain success of our plans can be assured by a fuller understanding of them, I will express them at length. This youth Inconstant, as we know already, is the heir to great possessions, far greater than he himself understands clearly. Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into his silly heart to conceive, the vastness of his inheritance. This Zion Towers is but a portion of it;" and Lust's eyes brightened as he spoke.

"True," cried Indolence, almost catching Lust's enthusiasm, "and so much the more fortunate for this worthy assemblage here. Thou hast a greedy appetite thyself, Master Lust, but Ignorance and I can equal it. It is of such as we that it has been said, Their throat is an open sepulchre."

"Most justly said, friend Indolence," replied Lust; "and without doubt we may in some measure satisfy our cravings at this foolish fellow's expense, and fatten our-

selves on his destruction. He is as an ox that goeth to the slaughter, and as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. But although there be no fear of our success in dealing with the youth, yet I would not bestow more pains upon compassing that success than is truly needful."

"Therein thou showest wisdom," said Indolence.

Here Ignorance, who had been for some time silent, put in a word. "And thou hast devised a plan which may shorten our time of waiting, as well as our labour therein?"

"It is of this that I desire now to speak," answered the eldest speaker. "We all know that the riches of this young man are not yet his own. He has only that which he needs from day to day, and though he may be permitted to draw largely from his Father's storehouses, yet is he not the less altogether dependent upon His good-will. I therefore fear lest, should we not devise some means of at once obtaining for ourselves whatsoever share may fall to his lot, it may in the end altogether escape us. Before he shall succeed to his estates, he will have become older and more wary, and it may be that, instead of keeping friends with us in those times, he shall turn us out of doors altogether."

"An unrighteous result indeed!" said Ignorance; "of what use should a man's possessions be, except to share them with his friends? And what right hath the Father of a young man, who is to be the heir of such important properties, to keep him for ever thus unworthily dependent?"

"As to that," replied Lust, "I think we are all pretty well agreed. I therefore purpose to advise the stripling that he demand at once from his Father some large portion of what is justly his own. When once he shall have obtained command over his inheritance, we will soon ease him of some of it, I warrant ye."

"Well, comrades," said Indolence, "for my part I am content to assist you as far as possible. But expect not too much from my labours; I am far too much occupied with important business elsewhere."

"We will let thee go easily, Master Indolence;" laughed the eldest conspirator. "We know thy turn of mind well; and be it thine, as an easy task, to open the conversation. For lo! I see the youth, coming across the meadows in the twilight towards us. Go thou to meet him."

With that, before they had been observed by Inconstant, Lust and Ignorance withdrew for awhile, and Indolence went forward to meet him, a smile on his face, and his hand outheld, ready to clasp that of the deceived stripling before him. Now Inconstant at once recognised his friend, uncertain though the light was, and running forward, lovingly embraced him.

"Ah! have I found thee at last, dear brother?" cried the young man, as his traitor-friend returned his embrace, "all day through have I longed for thy companionship in vain. Old Steadiman, the steward, has been these many hours gnawing at my heels, and only since this

last hour have I succeeded in shaking him off. Work in the harvest-fields, work in the vineyards, work in the buildings, work everywhere! But now have I escaped in the fading light, and found thee again, dear friend, to my exceeding satisfaction."

"Nor canst thou be more rejoiced to meet with me, dear Inconstant," rejoined Indolence, "than I with thee. Truly, thy Father's house is a majestic dwelling, its fields and gardens are plenteous and large, and there is no lack of rich provision both for body and mind. But, nevertheless, this eternal labour, wherewith both son and servant are continually plied, goes altogether against my grain. Better a little with ease and quietness, say I, than the grandest of livings and carefulness therewith."

"True," replied Inconstant, heaving a weary sigh, "thou speakest the very thoughts of my heart, friend Indolence. Oftentimes do I say, Oh that I might be done with this eternal toil! But this is my home; here was I born and bred, and one day I shall be a master, where now I am but a child."

"One day," sneered his companion. "Ah! waiting is sorry work. O that, instead of all this waiting and wearying, thy Father would make thee over at once some competent provision! Then might we two (with maybe a choice companion or so) go dwell together in some one of the many pleasant cities of Humanity Plains, and take our ease, eat, drink, love, and be merry!"

The bait, so cleverly thrown out, fell upon an eager

listener. "Yes," he faltered, "yes. But I dare not even dream of so delightful a chance. Yet see, hither come Lust and Ignorance, and with them we can converse further on this matter. Welcome again, friends."

"Welcome also to thee again," cried Lust, running forward. "We are glad to see some life still in thee. By my faith, I had almost feared that the strait-jacket of Zion Towers had crushed all the marrow out of thee."

"Not so as yet, friend Lust," said Inconstant, smiling. "Indeed, Indolence and I were but now debating the chances of my setting myself altogether free."

"Say you so?" cried Lust, pretending to be surprised; "this would be indeed a joyful deliverance. But what is thy plan?"

"Nay, we have no plan," rejoined Indolence, as quick at a lie as he was averse from labour, "only a desire as yet. But desire finds out a way. We were but speaking of a pleasant fancy of our own, and supposing (what may hardly be supposed) that Inconstant's Father might make over to him at once a portion of his inheritance, and let him depart whither he will."

"An excellent contrivance indeed," said Lust.

"But can it be accomplished?" enquired Ignorance.

Lust pretended to reflect. "The thought is certainly new to me," said the villain, after a pause, "and yet now that it has been suggested, it seems a likely one."

"It had not occurred even to me hitherto," said Inconstant, "but I would gladly do all in my power to further it."

Hereupon Lust, who had been simulating profound reflection, suddenly clapped his hands, as if he had made a great discovery, and cried, "I can advise thee, I can advise thee. I am taken much with this notion, and think it well worth the earliest consideration. Now, I know one hard by, a lawyer by trade, who would give a solid opinion on the matter, and, if necessary, act for thee in it. His name is Discontent, and he dwells a little below this, in the village of Worldly-mindedness. He is a man well known in these parts, has a large and increasing business, and is particularly competent in informing his clients as to whether they are kept out of their rights or not. I counsel that we should visit this excellent man at once, and take his advice as to thy case. We can converse further as we are on the road to his house."

"Indeed," said Ignorance, as Lust concluded, "I cannot but think that friend Inconstant is being grievously wronged in his present case. At his age, most young men are about the world enjoying themselves; and why not he?"

Inconstant was only too eager to acquiesce. "Perchance this friend of Master Lust will enlighten me," said he eagerly, "and at least no harm can be done by asking his advice: there will be no necessity to take it. So let us even be going to Mr. Discontent."

"Ah," cried Lust, encouragingly, "a fine thing it would be for thee, if thou couldst realise the property at once. Oh, what joys and delights are his who has youth, health and

money, and will use them freely ! For him are the smiles and the companionship of loveliness ; for him is the company of the gay, the gallant and the witty ; for him the earth pours out her secret treasures ; for him the vineyard empties itself into the wine-cup ; for him are days of sunshine, and nights of delirious joy ! ”

“ But as to the morrow of those nights, friend Lust ? ” asked Inconstant, almost against his wish.

“ The morrow ? ” laughed Lust. “ And what if it should not come ? And if it come, shall we be the happier to-morrow, for that we have been miserable to-day ? But so far as I can guess, to-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant. But I see that we are now close upon Mr. Discontent’s house, and must forbear further talking. ”

From the course of this conversation, it will be easily understood that Inconstant’s new adviser had little difficulty with him. Indeed, Mr. Discontent had been feed pretty heavily beforehand, and was therefore prepared to receive a visit. He cleverly pointed out to his young client that, although no father could be legally compelled to make the division which Inconstant desired, yet many cases of such a division had occurred ; and in this case there was this strong argument for it, that by such a course Zion Towers would be permanently rid of a disagreeable inmate. He also showed that Fairseeming would naturally assist Inconstant’s suit, inasmuch as his own share might be materially increased by its success. He further reminded his visitors that a future inheritance was at the best a

doubtful advantage, seeing that, before it fell in (if ever it fell in) the appetites and the powers necessary for its enjoyment might be almost lost. Lastly, Mr. Discontent offered to draw out and send in at once a formal application on Inconstant's behalf for an immediate gift of property, as well as permission to withdraw himself from his Father's house and authority, in return for a cession of all other present or future rights. To all of which devilish suggestions his miserable victim listened ; and, before he left, had signed the paper prescribed by Mr. Discontent, who also undertook to have it delivered at Zion Towers with all possible speed.

It was late in the night when Inconstant parted from his friends. Being parted from them, he felt for awhile exceedingly sad and ill at ease. Then, as his trusty body-servant, by name Conscience, (who had known him from a child,) came in and talked with him, and as he was helped by him to undress, the young man could not refrain from confessing that which he had done. Faithful old Conscience blamed him much ; nay, shed tears and besought him to change his purpose. But though in his heart he felt his old servant to be in the right, yet the pride and self-will of the young man were too strong to permit him to yield. Dismissing his attendant, and without either prayer or praise, Inconstant threw himself upon the couch and slept.

CHAP. III.

INCONSTANT RECEIVES HIS PORTION OF GOODS.

By reason that the chamber of Inconstant lay on the western side of Zion Towers, the earliest rays of the sun shone not thereon, and the young man accordingly slumbered on until late in the succeeding morning. The servants of the household had long commenced their daily tasks, some in the provision-stores, some in the meadows, the vineyards, the sheepfolds, and the orchards, some in the fruit gardens or amongst the fragrant flowers, and many in the various domestic duties. But one, and he amongst the elder and more grave of the household, sat patiently by the young man's side, and awaited his awakening. As he sat, he read a volume written by the Master's own hand, and here and there marked with lines of scarlet and gold, while by his side there also lay a roll of parchment.

At last, after many turnings and other signs of restlessness, the young sleeper awoke and perceived his visitor.

"Ah, Master Presbyter," said he, rubbing his eyes, "what brings thee here?"

"And why should I not be here, my young friend?" replied the old man, thus addressed. "Surely we have been acquainted long enough to allow me to shew by my presence here my anxiety respecting you. Your absence from the household at so late an hour had somewhat alarmed me. Dost thou not bethink thee that I held thee in my arms in the days of infancy? Rememberest thou not how I taught thee letters out of this very volume which I hold in my hand? Hast thou no memory of the tears with which thou hast often confessed thine errors to me, and sought my help and guidance?"

"True, good father, most true," replied Inconstant: "I trust I have a good remembrance of thy many kindnesses towards me in past days. But time flies; the blossom changes into the seed, and the infant into the man. I am no longer a child, and have no desire to be treated as one. Moreover, I wish for freedom, and intend to have it."

"Freedom, my son!" rejoined the older man, "and who is more free than the son of thy Father? We are not children of the bond, but of the free."

"Trouble me not, good Master Presbyter, with these rancid quotations," replied Inconstant, lightly, but decisively. "I am of an age to know my rights, and my mind about them. I shall proceed at once to demand them—indeed, I have already done so."

"O, my son," exclaimed Presbyter, "utter not the words of youth and foolishness! It is true that an application hath been already forwarded on thy behalf by a

pettifogging attorney named Discontent, in which some such mad proposition has been embodied, and the application was at once communicated to thy Father. But it was hoped that thou wouldest deny the signature affixed to this paper, and declare it to be that which it deserves to be, a base forgery."

"Nay, good Father Presbyter," replied the young man, springing from the bed on which up to this moment he had been lying half asleep, "nay; it is no forgery. I did not think that Discontent was so brisk a hand at delivering his citations; but the application is mine, and I entirely stand to it."

"What?" cried Presbyter, in his turn, somewhat aroused, "leave thy Father's house, and turn thy back upon wealth and plenty, and the tenderest of all loves, for the sake of a short pleasure with a sharp ending?"

"Not so fast, master preacher, not so fast," said Inconstant, getting angry. "Who says that I shall not do great things with my liberty? Who says that I shall squander the goods that befall me? Am I a dog or a fool?"

Presbyter paused a moment before he replied, "The wise man has said, Answer not a fool according to his folly. I will cease from further attempting to dissuade thee, and will pass on to other things. I have but in part fulfilled my commission as yet. Know, therefore, Inconstant, that if thy mind is indeed fully bent upon this thy foolish desire—But, Oh! I pray thee once again, repent of it."

"Nay," replied Inconstant, in a dogged tone, "I repent me not."

"Alas!" rejoined Presbyter, mournfully, "if indeed thou art so determined, then am I commissioned to hand unto thee a legal instrument, whereby, on the one part, thou dost agree to resign all thy rights as thy Father's son, and He, on the other part, covenants to divide unto thee His living."

"Show me the contract," cried the young man, astonished at the ease with which he had gained his desire; "show me the contract, that I may read it for myself."

Presbyter reverently laid aside the beautiful volume in which he had been reading, and rising up unfastened the scroll which had been lying at his side. The outer portion of this scroll was dark, yet spangled over with many stars; but the inner side was bright and clear. At the head of the writing lay a plan, drawn out in plots of various colours. After the plan followed the recital of the surrender by Inconstant of all other rights, on consideration of free gift of the properties, rights, and goods thereafter described. This recital, which was long, was written for the most part in a clear and free handwriting; but many portions of the document were also filled in with smaller handwriting, not so easy to decipher. There were even some passages which it were hard to read without the aid of magnifiers. Lastly, the enumeration and description being ended, there appeared the seal and signature of the loving hand which framed the gift, and a place also for the degenerate child to set his name and seal thereto.

It was not at once that Inconstant entirely understood the importance of this document, or its real meaning. He lay awhile, as though musing, and at length asked Presbyter to describe the terms of the deed as briefly as he might. To this Presbyter consented, unrolling the scroll little by little, and rolling it again as he proceeded. Now these following, not to mention many lesser things, were the principal gifts enumerated :

1. A life-long gift of all that portion of his Father's property which lay within the territory of Humanity Plains.

2. The famous instrument, called by some Understanding, and by others Reason. By this instrument every sort of measurement, whether of capacity, extension, or duration, could be easily effected. By it, moreover, the natures and actions of all visible things could be compared, and numberless other surprising feats performed.

3. A set of five keys, of curious and intricate design, called Hearing, Seeing, Smelling, Tasting and Touching. These keys were strung upon a band called Nerve, and would open nearly every lock in the world, but required great care in the handling, being exceedingly brittle and not of an enduring material. Moreover, when used too much, they lost their powers for awhile, and could only recover them by being laid aside in disuse.

4. A vast collection of objects of interest, known as the Museum of Human Experience. This museum was divided into many departments. The Historical department included specimens of every sort of event, and of the methods

employed by conspicuous persons to deal with each sort. The department of Inventions, to which additions were being constantly made, showed the progress of the arts and sciences, and their influence upon the welfare of mankind. The Scientific department recorded the early history and causes of all things, and explained the connection of past with present times. Furthermore, an excellent Library was attached to the museum, wherein the noble and ingenious reflections of the men of former days were recorded. Lastly, the Personal department contained a complete record of Inconstant's own life, stamped by a self-acting machine upon a continually unwinding roll, which, notwithstanding that it lay compactly folded in ever so small a space, yet could at any moment be referred to at any point.

5. An organ of incredible power and yet admirable sweetness and brightness of touch, in which were innumerable stops, and several complete subsidiary organs. The Passion-organ, in which the stop called Power-of-love was most notable, formed one portion of this marvellous piece of mechanism. Besides this, the Faculty-organ, of which the chief stop was named *Vox Humana*, and the Aspiration-organ, were included in the same. The power of this last-named (which was a swell organ, lying hid in a closed compartment) exceeded all belief. It had certain two stops, named Hope and Faith, on which a skilful performer might make such celestial music, that both they who heard it, and he who awakened it, seemed caught away to the third heaven. And, added to all this, the whole instru-

ment was not bulky nor difficult to be moved from place to place, but occupied only a moderate space ; and whithersoever the owner might travel, there also with the greatest ease could he carry with him this admirable contrivance.

6. A small volume, called the Book of the Divine Will. This was another copy of the book which Presbyterian had been so lately reading. But when Inconstant heard the mention of this, and saw, from its position upon the scroll, that it was the last item in the catalogue of his Father's gifts, he cried, "Enough. With this last I can willingly dispense ; thou hast read enough to me out of thine own copy to last a lifetime. This gift I leave to thee, in the hope that it may benefit some more likely scholar."

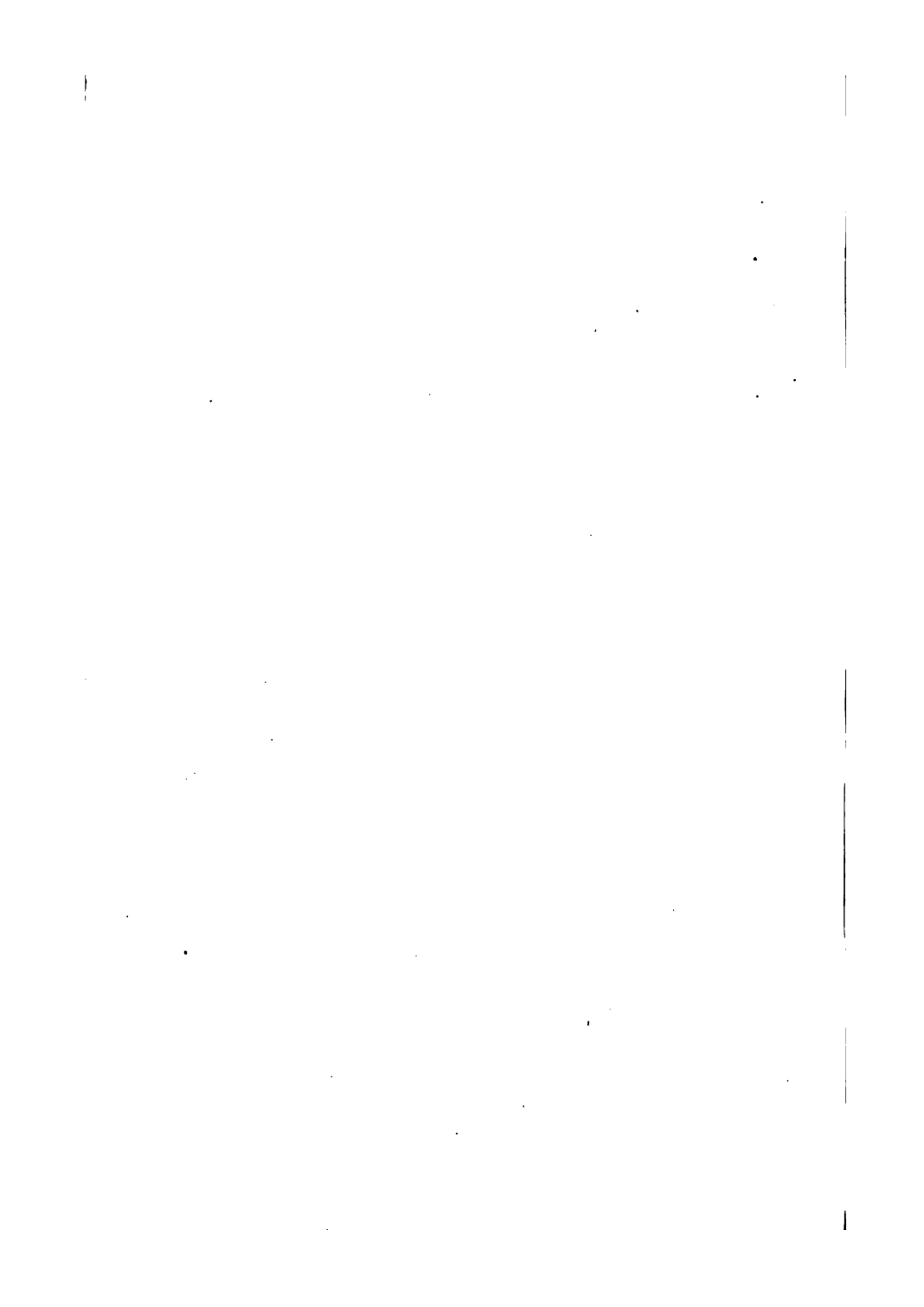
"Nay, my son," remonstrated Presbyterian, "thou must take all or none. Use or abuse, but not refuse—that is the condition."

"Be it so," cried Inconstant, "then will we take the bad with the good. Pack up the musty thing in some corner of that famous library, and let it go with me, if it must. And the sooner we depart the better. Why waste precious hours of possible enjoyment far away from this mournful mansion ? The die is cast, and it seems a better throw than I bargained for. When can all these things be delivered, as well as assigned, to me ? Is it within thy province, Mr. Presbyterian, to resolve me that ?"

"It is within my province," answered Presbyterian, mournfully ; "thou hast but to sign this paper, and they are thine." With this the aged man unrolled again the



INCONSTANT ACCEPTS HIS PORTION.



scroll already described, and read from the bottom of it—
“In consideration of which gifts, freely made over to me, I, Inconstant, resign my birthright, as Esau did, and all other my present or future rights in the heritage of Zion Towers.”

Without the hesitation of a moment, the young man dipped a pen into the inkstand that lay on his table, and would have signed at once. But here Presbyter once more entreated him to pause, even falling on his knees before him. “My office,” cried the old man, “is not merely to deliver to thee my Master’s message, but to exhort thee earnestly still to remain as thou art, provided for, loved, protected.”

While Presbyter was uttering these words, Conscience had also entered, and he, too, falling on his knees beside him, added his own entreaties. For a moment Inconstant wavered, but only for a moment. The remembrance of his wicked friends, and the fear of their laughter and mockery, came in between him and his suppliants, deafening his ears to their prayers, and blinding his eyes to the sight of their distress. He thrust them rudely from him, once more seized the pen, and in another moment had signed the deed with his full name.

As he wrote the last letter, a crash of falling ruins was heard, a wind swept through the casements with a mighty sound as of angelic moaning, and a misty darkness fell upon his eyes. His chamber, together with all its surroundings, melted beneath him into nothingness, like the foam on the billow. In another moment he became unconscious.

CHAP. IV.

INCONSTANT LEAVES HIS HOME.

When Inconstant recovered his senses, he perceived himself to be lying on the border of the narrow stream which separates the domain of Zion Towers from the territory of Humanity Plains, and on that side of the stream which lies the more distant from the mansion. Far away, across the meadows on the further side of the stream, he could still see the distant outlines of his Father's house, upon which it appeared that the setting sun was now casting a departing light. In front of the bank on which he lay ran a public highway, which he recognised at once as the main road to the territory of King Abaddon. This king is a potent monarch, whose own kingdom is not far from the principality of Humanity Plains, and to whom, indeed, this latter territory is in partial subjection. Of this highway Inconstant had often heard as an excellent road to travel, being broad, smooth, easy, and so imperceptibly sloping that the travellers thereon are for the most part unaware of the distance which they journey. Much traffic

goes by this road, and multitudes of pleasant companions are to be found, both for the rich man in his chariot and the honest wayfarer who has nothing but his own legs to carry him. Nor is the traffic one of pleasure-seekers only; much merchandize is carried down this way, and many business men have long regarded it as a short-cut in comparison with other more ancient roads. Houses of refreshment abound along its course, sometimes two or three together, and it is even said that when any of the poorer travellers become too wearied to continue their way on foot, the drivers of certain public conveyances have orders to carry such persons forward at the charges of the monarch to whose realms the road leads. It is also said that the entire cost of the road, even from its first construction, has been borne by the same munificent sovereign. Such liberality, if unexplained, would be almost beyond belief; but so great is the gain to the king's dominions from the continual influx of passengers and goods by this road, that in all likelihood it entirely answers his purpose to be at the charges already described.

By this broad highway, then, did Inconstant find himself seated, just at a turning where, between the road and the river, there was but space for the bank on which he lay. Knowing that the stream was in many places fordable, the youth might possibly have reconsidered his decision and retraced his steps; for a sense of indescribable loneliness for awhile appalled him, and as it happened at the moment that the space of road before him was

unoccupied, there was indeed some small opportunity for repentance. Alas! the opportunity, as will be seen, was speedily lost to him.

And here it is to be stated that, lonely and friendless as the young man supposed himself to be, his loneliness and friendlessness were more seeming than real. The tender love of that kind Parent, from whose care he had of his own accord departed, had by no means discarded the ungrateful child. At some little distance from Inconstant, although altogether invisible to him, were seated two companions. One of these had a lustrous countenance, and was clad in white and shining garments, clasped together with a golden girdle, and edged with a fringe of pearls. In some points he seemed of human fashion, but on an attentive consideration you might see that he belonged to the blessed company of the heavenly angels. Such indeed was he, having been separated for awhile from his celestial employments, and sent by the Father's love as a guardian to His wandering son. The second of the two invisible companions was none other than Conscience, Inconstant's former body-servant. At his own petition, this faithful companion of the youth had obtained permission to accompany him, at least some distance on his journeyings, and had further received the power of becoming visible or invisible at his own will. Thus then these two lay not far from the spot where Inconstant was reclining, and watched him silently.

For a few moments, as has been said, the youth

pondered, first the road before him, then the river and the landscape behind. But at length he broke forth into an impatient exclamation: "Is this, then," he cried, "that which I have been falsely promised? Did I not give up my claim to a younger brother's share of yonder proud mansion, on express condition that I should receive certain goodly gifts? Yet here am I, a wandering beggar on a public road! Stay," continued he, putting his hand to his breast, "here is something within my garment." With that he drew forth a small volume, and, seeing it, dropped it on the ground. "Pshaw!" said he, "this is nothing else than that very volume I almost refused to bring—that dismal book over which they are always spoiling their eyes in the dreary dwelling which I have so lately quitted. Old women's stories, worn out saws of extinct wisdom, relations of what never was, and promises of what never will be. I will have none of it. I have done my part, and brought it with me, but it shall trouble me no more." With which words he seized the little volume, and would have cast it into the stream, but that it fell somewhat short.

Then said Conscience to Watchful—for such was the angel's name—"Let us keep this book for the young man; he will need it one day." To which Watchful answered, "Yea, let us keep it for him. Would that I also could read and understand it, as this young man might. How often have I earnestly desired to look into its mysteries! But they are not for such eyes as mine." So saying, he

lifted up the book, and gently hid it within his shining garments, next his heart ; and, being there, it became for the time invisible.

Inconstant, looking round a moment or two afterwards, was surprised to perceive the book no longer, and might possibly have arisen to search for it, in momentary compunction. But at this instant, he heard the tinkle of approaching horse-bells, together with the roll of wheels, and perceived coming towards him a splendid and lengthy procession. It came over the crest of the hill on the right, from the direction of the bridge which joins the territories of Humanity Plains and Zion Towers, and it was proceeding down the slope towards Inconstant, on the way to the land of King Abaddon.



CHAP. V.

THE BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY.

The cavalcade, which now approached Inconstant, might well excite his attention. At the head of it rode his three friends, Ignorance, Indolence and Lust, on three gaily caparisoned steeds. Behind them rode the lawyer, Mr. Discontent, and after him followed a seemingly endless procession of footmen, horsemen, carriages and waggons, the last heaped up with vast burdens, and some of them so jealously fastened up and guarded as to suggest that they contained treasures.

Before Inconstant had time to reflect upon the meaning of this unexpected spectacle, the leaders of the procession had come up to the place where he lay. No sooner had they done so, than all four leaped from their horses, and ran towards him, crying out, "Well met! our young lord and master!" "Lord and master!" said Inconstant, "What means this? And what, I pray you, is the meaning also of all this company by which I see you followed?"

"These are the fruits, my lord," answered Mr. Dis-

content, advancing and speaking for the party, "of my application on your behalf. About noontide of this very day, the train which you see before you was placed at my disposal, as your representative. Having, therefore, ascertained by enquiry that you had proceeded in this direction, and having also to complete the formal taking possession of your landed and other estates in these parts, I at once engaged the companionship of your three trusty friends, and came forward, hoping to find you already on the road."

As yet, however, Inconstant could hardly realise his position. "This assemblage, then," faltered he, "which accompanies you—is it really mine? This title by which you address me,—these servants,—this vast collection of baggage, provision and treasure; are they truly my own? It seems to me like a dream."

"But it is no dream, my dear lord," cried Lust. "And had your lordship been present, as I myself was, when all these things were gathered together, you might well have wondered more than you wonder now. Not only have those things been delivered over, which were described in the contract (which friend Discontent has with him), but many other things not there enumerated. But this evening, when we shall encamp, or otherwise rest—for I see that the shades of night are falling fast around us—we shall be able to talk more largely of the matter."

Here Mr. Discontent broke in, "Good Master Lust is not entirely to be listened to. I am not so sure as he as

to the entire fairness of the division made on your behalf. Had they consulted me, I should have called attention to several important deficiencies. Barely scant justice has been done you ; nevertheless, such as the gift is, I thought it well to accept it on your lordship's behalf. But now let me formally deliver the goods to you, and entreat your lordship, before proceeding on your journey, to take some slight refreshment and to array yourself in attire more suitable to your high and noble condition."

With this, Mr. Discontent produced a sealed parchment, which Inconstant at once recognised as a copy of that which he had already signed, and handed it to the young man. He also requested him to observe that all the things stated therein were now at his disposal, a large portion being at present in view, and the remainder at the estate to which they were journeying. He then called to two menials, by the names respectively of Vanity and Pride, by whose expert assistance Inconstant was speedily arrayed in a costly and magnificent dress, sparkling with jewels, and radiant with exquisite colours. After this, a general halt being called, the whole company betook themselves for awhile to rest and refreshment. The inferior personages of the cavalcade seated themselves by the road side. As for Inconstant, his three friends, and Mr. Discontent, they reclined apart upon the greensward, and there feasted on delicacies and wines produced from the provision waggons, and selected under the eye of Lust himself. Meanwhile the shadows lengthened, the air grew crisp, and, here

and there in the eastern sky, some of the brighter stars began to be faintly discernible. At last, even Inconstant perceived the waning of the light, and, despite the remonstrances of Lust and Indolence, prepared to depart, issuing orders to that effect through Mr. Brain, an intelligent man who now presented himself as the head-conductor of the cavalcade.

"We shall not arrive at your lordship's property," said Mr. Discontent, when all had been prepared for departure, "until the morrow. I therefore propose that we shall rest for the night, when we shall have made some two hours' journey forward, at a place named Choice. It lies on the ridge of a hill, and from it there is a fine prospect on either hand. Thence you may see your own estate some distance in front of you; and in exceedingly clear weather (which, unhappily, does not happen often in those regions) you may even catch glimpses in the other direction of the mountains of Grace, and your own paternal mansion. There is also an inn there, by the sign of The Lot's Wife, where we can have good accommodation for your personal companions, and the rest of the train may find lodgings in the village."

To this, therefore, all agreed, and so once more set forth, Inconstant now riding in a chariot drawn by two pale horses, Indolence reclining beside him, and Lust and Ignorance facing him on the other seat. Mr. Discontent accompanied the chariot on horseback, and thus, although it was difficult to converse continuously with those

within, yet from time to time he contrived to approach and put in a word or two. Closely afterwards followed the train of servants and goods, and at some little distance, within sight (if they had been visible), yet hardly within hearing, came Conscience and Watchful the angel.

It was well nigh midnight, when the resting-place on the hill Choice was reached. But the time of the journey had passed pleasantly enough, enlivened with anticipations of future delight, and cheered with boisterous songs and other merriments. Hence, not being altogether wearied, Inconstant was able, before retiring to rest, to walk forwards to the edge of the hill, and contemplate the prospect, which Mr. Crafty, the innkeeper, assured him was even more surprising than Mr. Discontent had described it to be. And truly it was so. The moon was now midway through the sky, and all the stars were out; the air was soft, yet refreshingly cool and sweet. A fragrant scent of the pine-trees which topped the hill, and of the flowers in the neighbouring gardens of the inn, stole unconsciously upon the senses, floating on a gentle wind. It was dark enough to give a mysterious beauty to the scene, yet not so dark as to hide its outlines. Beneath, the road descended rapidly through a rocky gorge, and from the foot of this seemed to extend a vast well-wooded plain, the edges of which were lost in an uncertain distance. Some little space onwards in the plain sparkled the many lights of a great city, mapping it out as on a plan. Here and there they concentrated into glowing centres; here and there

they crossed each other in intricate and fiery lines; there again they ran out in slender threads of brightness into the surrounding country, like the radiating spokes of a golden spider's web. Over the city the sky was lurid, and a subdued hum, mingled with the sound of far-off pealing bells, told that it was not yet entirely sleeping.

"What is this city?" asked Inconstant of the inn-keeper, who had accompanied the party as a guide.

"Yonder beautiful city," answered Mr. Crafty, "is the city of Earthly-Delight."

CHAP. VI.

THE CITIZENS OF EARTHLY-DELIGHT RECEIVE THEIR LORD.

The front windows of The Lot's Wife look towards the plain in which lies the city of Earthly-Delight, and only its hinder windows look towards Zion Towers. Inconstant and his friends were naturally lodged in the front chambers, nor did he remember, until somewhat advanced on the following morning's journey, that, had he been so minded, he might have enjoyed a parting glance at his former home from the inn which he had left. But the beauty and extent of the scene which had been opened to him from the ridge of the hill during his night-ramble had so occupied the young man's thoughts, that his only desire now was to shorten, as much as possible, the time which came between him and the full enjoyment of his newly-acquired properties.

The conversation naturally turned, as the company descended the hill on the following morning, upon the many interesting features of the prospect. It had appeared beautiful and extensive, even in the partial darkness of the night, but as the travellers drew nearer, and the sun arose

in his strength, new beauties and new objects of curiosity became apparent.

"I like the nearer aspect of this city much," said Inconstant, gazing eagerly forward. "It seems to be a walled city."

"You are right, my lord," replied Lust. "Its walls ensure its peace and safety, besides that they afford an agreeable place of exercise, and romantic views of the surrounding country. Many times have I walked their circuit with delight."

"Still, Master Lust," said Mr. Discontent, drawing near, "you should not conceal from our young lord that they serve important uses. In truth the Prince of this country has found it necessary to build these walls, because of the powerful enemies who from time to time attack the city."

"And who are these?" enquired Ignorance.

"Well, if you will have their names," answered the lawyer, "there is General Judgment, with his lieutenants Destruction and Vengeance, and other truculent ruffians of the same stamp. But the principal of them is a well known robber-chief, by name Death. Some say this wretch is not so bad as he is painted; but it is certain that the citizens of Earthly-Delight would be happier without him."

"Yet confess this, good Mr. Discontent," rejoined Lust, "that they contrive to be very comfortable, notwithstanding his existence."

But this strong vein of conversation was too much for Indolence. "I think," said he, "this conversation might take a more agreeable turn, my friends."

"And I agree with Mr. Indolence," said Inconstant. "So let us leave the consideration of our enemies for a while, and be satisfied with more pleasant matter for our thoughts. There seem to be in yonder city many spires, domes, and other forms of roof which belong to religious buildings. Especially do I mark a more than usually massive building, on whose white front the sun is even now flashing, and which seems of the nature of a temple or church. What is this?"

"That, my lord," replied Lust, "is the great Temple of Self, the most frequented of any in the city. But you will see it much better hereafter. The nearer one draws to it, the more magnificent will it appear."

"And surely I see, as we draw closer," continued the young lord, "that the city is encompassed by a river; yet not such as an ordinary river."

"Your observation, my lord," answered Mr. Discontent, "is most just. The river which you behold is the far-famed River Sin. It encompasses the whole city, save at one point, where a narrow and rarely-used causeway leads forth in the direction of Zion Towers. Its waters, also, are far higher in heat than those of ordinary rivers, so that anything inflammable is at once fired by them; and any living thing which drops into the stream is with the greatest difficulty saved from destruction. You will also observe, if you consider the river carefully, that it lies between lofty embankments on each side. Indeed, the level of its waters is already considerably higher than most of the plain; and

if the embankment were to give way, I would not answer for the consequences."

"There is much virtue in your 'If,'" said Lust. "Thou knowest well, Mr. Discontent, that such an accident is well nigh impossible, that the banks are watched night and day, and that no reasonable precaution is left untried."

"Otherwise, beautiful as the city seems to be," hinted Inconstant, "methinks it would be somewhat dangerous as a place of residence."

But this would not do for Lust. "You must not let Mr. Discontent set you against this city, my lord. So far from this river being an injury to the noble city of Earthly-Delight, it is much the opposite. Its waters spread an agreeable warmth in all directions, very favourable to the growth of many most valuable plants and trees; they also supply motion to a multitude of manufactories, and so find employment for many of the dwellers on their banks. They further enable much trade and commerce with foreign parts to be brought to the very doors of the city. Again, so far as the citizens themselves are concerned, many solid and handsome bridges have been built at different times across the stream, so that it now forms little hindrance in either entrance to, or departure from, the city. Lastly, I should tell you that those brilliant and beautiful lights which we saw sparkle afar off, from the top of the hill Choice, are mainly manufactured from the waters of this same river. You will therefore see at once that, notwithstanding some

disadvantages—and what good is without disadvantages?—the citizens would be sorry to lose their beautiful and remarkable stream.”

“At least, yawned Indolence, “the embankment is pretty safe to last our time.”

Here the conversation was interrupted by the sight of an approaching procession, coming towards them, and now first visible at the end of the long avenue of arching trees, underneath which their road now ran. The air had already insensibly become softer, the road had widened into a spacious and smooth highway, and the prospect on each side had become more beautiful. Stately trees now bordered the track on either hand, and on the branches of many of them hung delicious fruits of varied colours. Between the road and the pathway were planted edgings of brilliant flowers, and at the pathway side were resting-places, many of them embowered in climbing plants, and some so arranged that those who employed them might enjoy the sight of that which passed on the road. Here and there were fountains, not only of water, but of more potent and enjoyable drinks, and on either side stretched in every direction pleasure-gardens, through which runlets from the waters of the river were caused to flow, producing a luxuriously warm atmosphere and a continual fertility.

Now, also, the inhabitants of the city began to be seen. Few of them were on foot, and those who were so seemed to have no particular business to perform. Here and there one seemed to be walking or even running, for the sake of

health, but most were sitting under the shade or gathered into groups, and engaged in conversation. They were for the most part richly clad, and appeared to be of courteous and pleasant manners one to the other, although Inconstant remarked that the countenances of many of them wore a languid cast, and that neither their words nor their gestures were altogether so active and lively as he would have wished. He might perhaps have called the attention of his friends to this, had not the cavalcade, which had appeared advancing to meet his own, now almost reached him, and so drawn off his observation upon itself.

The two processions seemed at first likely to come into collision ; but as the leader of that which came from the city drew near to the horses of Inconstant's outriders, he blew a blast upon a horn which he carried with him, and all his followers immediately came to a halt. Inconstant, uncertain what was to happen, gave orders for the same movement.

On this, four riders of those who came from the city advanced to the side of Inconstant's chariot, and, doffing their caps, gravely saluted him.

"Are we right in supposing," said the foremost of the four, "that we are addressing my Lord Inconstant, lord of the manor of Earthly-Delight?"

Inconstant gave a sign of assent.

"Then let me introduce myself, my lord," continued the spokesman, "as the Lord Provost of that city. I am Sir Practical Smoohtongue. This gentleman is our

Town-clerk, Mr. Ingenuity. The gentleman on my left is the Director of the Public Pleasures, Professor Temporal ; and this is our good Archelder, Dr. Sapo."

"You do me much honour, my Lord Provost," said Inconstant. "I had not expected that I should meet with any public reception into your good city."

"We had news of your coming, my lord," replied the Provost, "early this morning, by a swift runner from The Lot's Wife, on yonder hills. We thought it, therefore, but respectful to come out and salute you. And, indeed, it is needful to perform certain formal duties, before admitting you to the city as our lord. You will perceive, my lord, that the gate of the city, towards which this road leads, is at present shut?"

Inconstant had not even perceived that the gate of the city was within sight, but now looking forward he saw that the road on which they were travelling ended in a strongly-fortified gateway, the door of which was closed.

"And what are the formalities you refer to, my Lord Provost?" enquired Inconstant.

"They are twofold, my lord," said Sir Practical. "It will be necessary, in the first place, for you to produce your title-deeds, to the satisfaction of Mr. Ingenuity here. In the second place, you must produce the key of yonder gateway. We have five principal gateways, and the Lord of the Manor has the keys of all in his own possession."

"As to that," cried Mr. Discontent, "my Lord Inconstant will have no difficulty in either matter; I have the

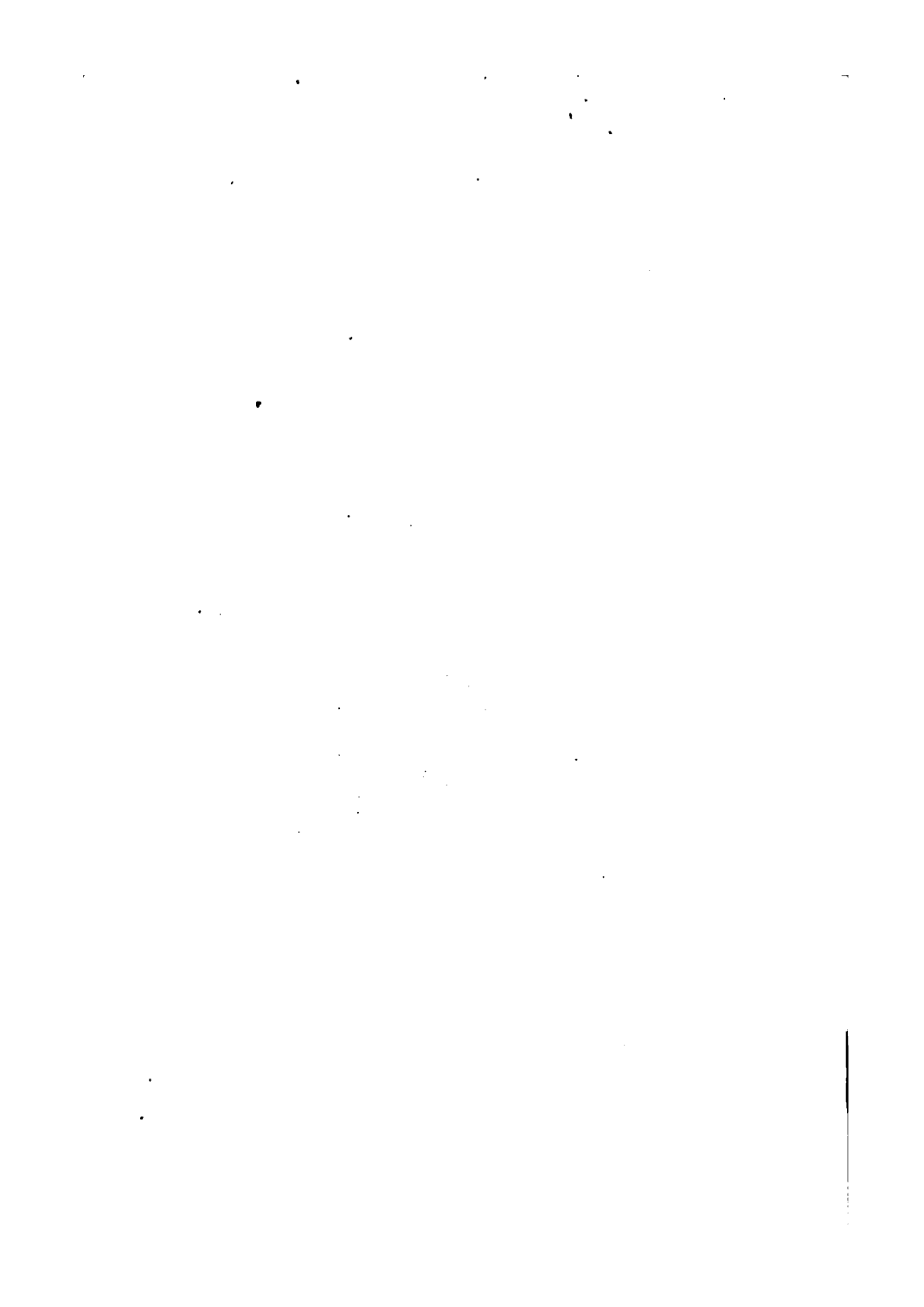
title-deeds here, and will confer with Mr. Ingenuity as we ride along. Here also is the key called Taste, and if this is not the key required, I am much mistaken."

"You are entirely in the right, Mr. Discontent," said the Town-clerk, glancing at the key; "pray give my Lord Inconstant the key, and you and I will talk the other matter over as we ride. You seem to forget me, but we are old friends. How goes it in the town of Worldly-mindedness now?"

With this, the conference for the present broke up, and the party from the city having been joined to Inconstant's company, all made the best of their road to the entrance-gate. Before they could come thereat, they had of necessity to cross the river Sin. At this point, however, it is but a narrow stream, although very deep, and the road is carried across by a bridge of a single arch. As they crossed the bridge, Inconstant looked curiously at the stream beneath, and perceived that it was of a bright amber colour, sprinkled with brilliant sparks. It seemed to have a rapid flow, and the heat of the water caused his face to flush and his eyes to gleam, although he could not perceive that it so affected his companions. On the other side of the river, but a few paces onward, was the gateway, flanked on either hand with the walls of the city, and so lofty and so broad that no glimpse of the town within could as yet be obtained. The gate itself was narrow, and but one person could pass through at once. Over the doorway were carved some ancient letters, half effaced.



THE GATE OF EARTHLY DELIGHT.



"What are these letters, my Lord Provost?" enquired Inconstant.

"Indeed, my lord," replied the Provost, "I am no antiquarian. They have long been so defaced as to be illegible; but perchance the Archelder can enlighten us."

"They are a fragment from the sacred books of a forgotten religion, my lord," replied Dr. Sapo. "One of my predecessors in my office esteemed them likely to cause doubt in the minds of unwary and ignorant persons, and therefore caused them to be thus effaced. In our present language, they read '~~Man~~ is born to trouble.' An obvious untruth. Man is born to make the best of all the worlds with which he may have the good fortune to meet." And with this the Archelder laughed melodiously, in which he was joined by most of the company.

"It is now for you, my lord," said the Lord Provost, "to enter into the city. You have but to place the key you have received in the lock, and your task will be accomplished."

"Stay," said Mr. Discontent, "let me first bid your lordship good-day. We find that all your papers are in perfect order, and I can therefore leave them safely with Mr. Ingenuity. I have many calls at home, and shall be well pleased to return. Mr. Ignorance also kindly tells me that he will keep me company."

"Say you so, Mr. Discontent?" said Inconstant, secretly glad to be rid of him; "but we shall see you again?"

"Whenever you have need of me, my lord, command my services," replied the lawyer; and with that he bowed low, and turned to depart.

"But thou also, dear Ignorance," said Inconstant, not so willing to part from him as from the lawyer, "must thou indeed leave so soon? Wherefore shouldest thou depart?"

"Nay," replied Ignorance, "I care not to see new scenes. I wish you well, my dear lord, but I am already weary, and would rather be quietly at home."

"Well, if parting must indeed come, dear Ignorance," said Inconstant reluctantly, "fare thee well." And so, with many tender words, he let him go after Discontent. Then turning to the city gate, the young man put the key of Taste gently into the lock. The door at once opened, and showed the way straight into the city. At the same moment, also, four trumpeters stationed on the tower blew a blast of trumpets, and a choir of singers from the same place burst forth into a song of tumultuous welcome. Then, Inconstant first and the others one by one after him, the whole company passed into the city. But Watchful, the angel, and Conscience, his companion, had well nigh been shut out. He who kept the gate was expert at his business, and as the last of the company had passed in, he was for shutting the door at once, so that they two, not being visible, had small chance of entering. Yet was there one moment of delay, and using that as their opportunity, they also entered into the city.

CHAP. VII.

THE CITY OF EARTHLY-DELIGHT : ITS RELIGION, AND ITS OTHER WAYS.

The house of residence and park, which had been made over to Inconstant, as part of his manorial rights over the city of Earthly-Delight, are situated on the further side of the city from that gate by which he entered it. They lie within the walls, for that is a necessity of all safe dwelling at the city, both by reason of the river which flows around and of the enemies to whose attack the city is continually exposed. But the walls and the river are artfully hidden by clumps of thickly-planted trees, and by grassy slopes ; and although the pleasure grounds of the mansion are much contracted by this difficulty of its situation, yet so ingeniously are the walks contrived, so splendid are the hot-houses, vineries, and orchard-houses, so brilliant is the display at all times of the loveliest possible flowers, so picturesque is the alternation from the Classical Garden to the Wilderness, and thence to the rockeries, the ferneries, and the Woodland Garden, that it is easy to forget both the narrowness of the prospect and the dangers which are so near. And

although the house itself lies much too low for healthfulness, and no endeavour is made to gain a distant outlook, yet every possible desire which sense and flesh can otherwise conceive is here abundantly provided for. The softest of coverings overspread the floors, and if these are anywhere uncovered, it is in order to disclose the finest work of inlaid marbles, or polished foreign woods. The chambers, which lead one into another, and also open out of a common central hall, are fitted with luxurious furniture, and their walls are hung with priceless and attractive paintings. In short, nothing that human ingenuity can devise, or human wealth can purchase, is absent from this lordly dwelling.

Here Inconstant found a chamber already prepared for him, and, after a banquet of choice viands and abundant wines, retired to rest, attended by his two new body-servants, Pride and Vanity; Lust and Indolence being lodged in adjoining chambers. In the morning a deputation of citizens, headed by the Lord Provost, waited upon him; and soon afterwards, attended by some of the most honourable of these, he set forth to view the city.

The object to which their steps were first bent was the famous building to which Inconstant's attention had been already directed from a distance, namely, the Temple of Self. Lust had spoken the plain truth when he declared that the nearer the spectator drew to this magnificent building, the more magnificent would it appear. It stands in the centre of the city, at the western end of the great public square, of which it occupies one complete side, the

Ministry of Public Pleasure occupying the opposite side. The whole of the front is composed of mirrors, arranged in innumerable forms and diversified positions, and the same plan of decoration is more or less carried throughout all the building. Along its principal front are also to be seen many statues, representing persons remarkable for discoveries and inventions which either lessen pain or increase pleasure. And in the great central tower there is a peal of eight bells, which plays four times every day for the pleasure of the inhabitants of the city.

Upon the steps leading up to the great eastern door, Inconstant and his attendants found Archelder Sapo awaiting him, accompanied by many of his subordinate clergy. In person this high official was tall and rather slender, with a venerable appearance, a mellow voice, and a peculiarly sweet smile. It was chiefly to him that the great temple at whose doors he was now standing owed even its existence, not to say its splendour. Before his time, the citizens of Earthly-Delight had paid little or no attention to any religion but the worship of an idol named Mammon; and this worship had been carried on, not in any public and central temple, but in the private houses and shops of the citizens. The act of worship had also been very simple and unedifying. The worshipper simply set up a coin edgeways, and then, having prostrated himself before the idol thus erected, prayed that it might be pleased to become double. But, on the arrival of the Archelder, all this was changed. The old worship was not, indeed,

discarded ; on the contrary, there are many who think that it continued to be practised with even more earnestness than before ; but the worship of Self was revived in its ancient purity, and a new and more elevating ritual was introduced. The entire city, together with all its dependencies, became speedily devoted to the revived religion. A public and recognized religion had for some time been declared by all to be the one thing wanting to the city. The Religion of Self, therefore, was now openly raised to the vacant position, and Dr. Sapo, as a natural result, was requested to fill the office of chief minister, then fortunately vacant. Hence arose the splendid building at which Inconstant was now received ; and hence, also, similar buildings, although not upon so splendid a scale, in every ward of the city, and in every district of its subject territory.

As Inconstant ascended the eastern steps the great clock tolled the hour of noon, and no sooner had the last chimes of the clock died away than the peal of bells began its third daily performance. A numerous body of worshippers at once began to assemble, and the Archelder, informing Inconstant that the third daily service was now about to commence, requested his attendance. Inconstant's party, therefore, at once entered the building, Inconstant himself being placed under the charge of an assistant, while the Archelder retired to make preparation for taking part in the service.

Having seen so large a number of worshippers enter into

the temple, Inconstant was surprised to find, upon entering, that the interior of the building was apparently empty. However, this was soon explained. In shape, the temple was a vast semi-amphitheatre, in the centre of which stood a platform, unoccupied, except by a gracefully carved dwarf pillar wreathed with evergreens, on the summit of which was burning a bright fire of fragrant frankincense. The whole of the auditorium was divided into compartments, of which each worshipper had one entirely to himself. Each of these was furnished with a luxurious couch, on which the occupant might recline, and it was so arranged that every person in the congregation, although unseen by his neighbours, might enjoy a full view of the central altar. This secrecy was explained by the attendant to be one of the main features of the worship of Self; but Inconstant was assured that, if he were to occupy the position of the central altar, he would perceive that every available position was always fully occupied. Every worshipper, while secure from intrusion upon his own devotions, might feel thoroughly assured that all around him were engaged in a similar occupation to his own.

The worship then commenced. It was exceedingly simple. Amidst soft and yet inspiriting music, three priests, whose dresses corresponded to the three primitive colours, appeared upon the platform, and there sang three hymns to the Spirit of Time, the Spirit of Force, and the Spirit of Matter. After this, a fourth minister read a Form of Unbelief, in which the congregation heartily joined.

Inconstant, being in one of the compartments alone, had no opportunity of observing the devotions of his neighbours ; but the sound of the united voices was at once appalling and yet melodious. This being ended, Dr. Sapo appeared on the platform, and proceeded to deliver an oration, of which the following is an abstract :

“The Religion of Self,” he said, “had two great principles, ‘Live,’ and ‘Let Live.’ In ordinary language, this meant—enjoy yourselves to the utmost of your power, and do not permit yourselves to be troubled about the enjoyments of others. It had likewise two practical rules of life, Meats for the body, and, The Body for meats. Apply this to ordinary circumstances and it meant, Grasp all you can, and study how to obtain the most pleasure from what you have grasped. It had further two negations, Yesterday and To-morrow. What was Yesterday? Let us forget it. What is To-morrow? A Phantom. These twofold principles, twofold positive precepts, and twofold negative precepts, of their beloved religion, were well known to his congregation, and were probably more fully practised than the precepts of any religion which had ever existed. He had stated them thus fully, because they had amongst them to-day their new Lord of the Manor, who might naturally wish to make himself acquainted with the opinions of the citizens. He would now only add that their religion was liberal—it allowed every one to worship what he pleased, when he pleased, and how he pleased ; or, if he should prefer it, to worship nothing at all. The service would now conclude with the usual exhibition of the Great Idol.”

With these words the Archelder descended from the platform. Immediately afterwards, the fire upon the altar was brightened by some invisible agency, and the windows of the temple were at the same time silently darkened. A gloom overspread the whole interior, in the midst of which a solemn chant was commenced by unseen choristers ; and, slowly rising amidst the incense of the altar, Inconstant beheld a large and exquisitely-cut crystal in human shape, and having countless facets. In each facet, he perceived the image of himself. But no time was given for a lengthened inspection. The sudden flame descended, the day-light was again admitted, and the worship of the hour was over.

A few minutes only had elapsed, when the Archelder rejoined Inconstant's party, and announced himself as now at leisure to accompany the new lord of the manor through the various sights of the city. The first object of attention, after the temple, was naturally the Ministry of Public Pleasure.

"You will have observed, my lord," said the Archelder, "that the sole object of the citizens of this city is Pleasure. I have already stated publicly that we have entirely uprooted those two antiquated notions, reverence for the Past, and belief in the Future. We worship the Present, and we have succeeded in making it pretty nearly all that we desire. Our system is, ten hours sleep, one hour work, nine hours amusement, and four hours eating and drinking. The nine hours' amusement is divided into two sections of

four hours and five hours each, the first commencing with the service just concluded, and the second from the conclusion of the evening meal. The Ministry of Public Pleasure is therefore charged with the supply of agreeable occupation for these hours, and we shall see, as we proceed, how it effects its object."

Here they entered the Ministry, and being at once led into the chamber of Professor Temporal, the Minister, were received by him with all honour.

"I have been brought here, Mr. Professor," began Inconstant, "by my good friends, the Lord Provost and the Archelder, to enquire touching your way of life in this delightful city. The good Archelder tells me, that you have to supply nine hours' amusement daily."

"You speak truly, my lord," replied the Minister, "and a difficult task we sometimes find it. Still, by the offering of large rewards for new pleasures, and by careful arrangements, we succeed better than would be supposed."

"May I ask some particulars of your plans?" continued the Lord of the Manor.

"By all means, my lord," replied the Professor, graciously. "We divide the work. We have one set of officers who look to the Department of Scientific Pleasure, another direct the Department of Bodily Pleasure, and a third provide for the direction of all Public Worshipships."

"Worships?" exclaimed Inconstant, surprised that such occupations should be regarded as a pleasure. "Is there, then, any other worship than that at which I have already attended?"

"Assuredly, my lord," said the Lord Provost, taking up the cudgels for his city, "we are a religious people. We have lately attended the worship of the National Religion, but there are many others practised among our citizens. A goddess, named Fashion, has several important temples here, and the worship of the Graces and the Muses has also been somewhat restored after the old classical pattern."

Here the Archelder put in a word. "Did I not declare in my discourse but now, my lord, that our National Religion was liberal and tolerant in the extreme? In fact, you can see within but a few paces from here several most elegant buildings, in which the goddess Fashion is continually worshipped. Mammon also has his temples still, but they are in the more commercial parts of the city, and his worshippers are something ashamed of too much publicity."

"Would it not be as well," suggested Sir Practical, at this juncture, "at least if Professor Temporal here is at leisure, to ask his assistance, and conduct my Lord Inconstant at once through the city?"

To this request the Minister of Public Pleasure of course gave consent, and once more the party commenced its tour of inspection, nor was it until the first evening chimes that it was concluded.

Some account of the city has already been given, but space would fail entirely to describe it. In the centre lies the square open space already spoken of, and branching out from this in five directions are five main streets, each end-

ing in a gateway, similar to that by which Inconstant entered, and named respectively, after those gates, the streets of Hearing, Seeing, Touching, Tasting and Smelling. Each of those main thoroughfares is occupied by such establishments as correspond to the naming of the street. Thus, in Hearing Street are the great Opera House, the shops of musicians of every kind, the rooms of rhetorical professors, and so on : in Seeing Street are situated many theatres, galleries of painting, and magazines of dealers in fine arts : in Touching Street are an Asylum for the Blind, toy-shops of every kind, gymnastic rooms, the City Baths, and other like establishments—some, alas ! of no good repute. So likewise for the other main thoroughfares, all being alike broad and smooth, furnished with causeways on either hand, planted with lines of evergreen trees, sheltered from the sunlight by gaily-covered awnings, and closed in at one end by the fortified gateways leading to the river bridges, and at the other end by the great public square, high above which rises the magnificent centre tower of the great Temple of Self.

The spaces left between these radiating streets are partly filled by circular roads, and partly by public and private gardens. Here reside the more wealthy of the citizens, and here also are many of the public buildings. Here were the famous Museum and Library which had been made over to Inconstant, and in one of the larger open sections stood the mansion of Inconstant himself. Not far from this is the College of Scientific Pleasures, where the

Board already referred to has its head-quarters. The students of this College are but few compared with the population, but they have been increasing of late, and public attention has been more than ordinarily drawn to their proceedings.

Professor Temporal, when they came to the College, was for entering, but Inconstant declined. "I have had study enough for one lifetime," said the young man, "and am well content to leave such things henceforward to my learned friends."

"Nor would I myself advise you to enter, my lord," said Dr. Sapo. "These people, I should tell you, are for the most part bitterly opposed to the glorious National Religion, of which I have the honour to be the chief minister. They vainly consider that Duty and not Pleasure is the law of life. In my humble opinion, much learning hath made them mad."

"At any rate," cried Inconstant, gaily shrugging his shoulders, "no more of them for me. Lead the way, my Lord Provost, to something more entertaining."

With that they betook themselves to the City Kursaal, and thence to the Long Esplanade. The City Kursaal is, in truth, little better than a gambling house, and long discussions have from time to time taken place in the City Council as to the propriety of closing it. But it has been as often represented that, by reason of its existence, many travellers and much profit come to the city, and that if any one citizen appear to lose his money

thereat, it is simply transferred, partly into the pockets of some other citizen, and partly into the coffers of the State, which lays it out for the general good. Hence the Kursaal is still standing. Around it are lovely gardens, at night illuminated with myriads of variegated lamps, and enlivened by the strains of entrancing music. Refreshment houses, where every form of stimulating drink may be cheaply had, and saloons for conversation and dancing, adjoin the central buildings ; and in these, multitudes of gay, though dissolute, company of both sexes may generally be found.

It being broad daylight, however, when Inconstant and his party first visited this institution, but little was to be seen. Only a few persons were found at one of the gaming tables ; but Lust whispered Inconstant that he had only to return at night-time to behold far more exciting scenes ; and, as will be seen hereafter, the young Lord of the Manor followed this advice only too completely. Passing thence, therefore, they reached the Long Esplanade, or River Walk, one of the chief glories of the city of Earthly-Delight. Here the daring genius of the citizens had converted the terrors of the burning river into a source of extreme delight and beauty. Advantage of its nearness and warmth had been taken to construct a tropical garden between its banks and the city wall ; and this had been extended and improved from time to time until the scene had become one of surpassing loveliness. At the upper end of the garden, also, the waters of the stream were lifted to a higher level, so as to feed fountains and cascades, and these,

moreover, were so arranged as to be capable of being lit up in the night-time with coloured fires. Furthermore, in the city walls were formed arbours and rooms for refreshment, both of food and drinks; and here and there were platforms for public dancing. Most of these latter almost overhung the river; and Inconstant pointed to them with some dismay. But the good Archelder laughed him off. "It was true," he said, "that some danger might arise from their position. He believed, indeed, that cases not unfrequently occurred, in which persons (probably half-intoxicated) did fall from them into the stream; but on the other hand, what was this compared with the general pleasure derived from the exciting influence of the presence of some little danger? Accidents will occur; and what would the lovers of excitement do without them?"

Before they had concluded their survey of this part of the city, the sun had begun to decline, and it was time to think of returning. The Archelder thereupon intimated that he had prepared a banquet of welcome, and should feel honoured if my lord, with his two friends and the rest of the company, would favour him with their presence.

Inconstant at once consenting, further explorations were deferred until succeeding days, and the whole company adjoined to the Temple Palace, as the residence of Dr. Sapo was termed. It lay behind the main building, in a secluded and quiet position, and, although at once accessible from the most populous portion of the city, was fairly provided with gardens and pleasure-grounds.

The Archelder and Inconstant occupied the first of the carriages in which the company had been conveyed from place to place, and the former was the first to descend on their arrival at the palace, in order to welcome his guests. But no sooner had the doors of the mansion opened, and the character of the visitors been announced, than a female form, robed in a dark purple dress, hastily descended the inner staircase, and stood in the flood of light at the entrance. Who this was became soon apparent, for the Archelder at once ascended the steps, and taking her by the hand, kissed her forehead, and greeted her as his daughter. Then, turning again to the door, he led Inconstant into his palace, and bade him welcome both in his own and in his daughter's name.

"My wife," said he, "has now for some time been deceased, and my daughter Pulchella does the honours of my mansion. Permit me to present her to you." Thus saying, he led his daughter forward, and Inconstant and she joined hands.

Pulchella was a maiden of no ordinary loveliness, and her dress became her. Tall and dark, of queenly presence, with lips of scarlet red, fathomless eyes, and flowing blue-black tresses, held together off her forehead with a golden circlet. At once Inconstant knew that the city of Earthly-Delight had yet another link in the chain which it was beginning to bind around him; even the power of a woman's beauty.

CHAP. VIII.

INCONSTANT'S LIFE IN DANGER.

Mention has been already made of the robber-chief, Captain Death, and of the perpetual warfare which he waged with the city of Earthly-Delight. In this warfare he had always been to a certain extent successful, and had succeeded in exacting a regular black mail, in the form of a certain number of the citizens to be delivered annually to his will. The advanced outposts of this robber-chieftain lay just beyond the gate of Seeing, and to this outpost the victim-citizens, selected by lot, had to be conducted. Here they were delivered one by one to Captain Death's representative, by name Lieutenant Grave, and then they disappeared for ever from the sight of their fellow-citizens. As might be expected, this terrible and unremitting absorption of the population was a mournful drawback to the enjoyments of the city. The lots for those to be delivered up were being continually drawn, and no one knew whether his own name might not be next on the list. Still, as the Arch-elder always reminded his intimates, nothing could be

gained by lamentation, and the only practicable alleviation was so to manage the lottery in which the names were drawn, that the poorer and less serviceable of the citizens should as far as possible be selected, and the fate of the more well-to-do as long as possible deferred.

However, with this arrangement the robber himself was not by any means satisfied. He demanded not merely to have infants, half-grown children, half-starved paupers, and worn-out, sickly or aged persons, delivered to him, but also persons of good standing, and of full health and vigour; and the dispute on this question was at its height when Inconstant came to the city. The new Lord of the Manor naturally took vigorous part with the citizens, encouraged them to resist the claims of Captain Death with still greater pertinacity, and for his own sake, as well as theirs, determined to concede none of his demands which could possibly be evaded.

The truth is, that Inconstant soon began to tremble for himself. It will be easily understood that the city of Earthly-Delight offered to the young man such unexpected charms and joys that it was hard even to contemplate for a moment the possibility of being suddenly torn from them, and hurried off into that mysterious darkness, in which the fate of the robber's victims was so closely hidden. In the shortest possible time, Inconstant and his friends Lust and Indolence (now more dear than ever) had found themselves entirely at home in the fair city to which they had been conducted. Lust, as has been already explained, had before

resided in the city, and was well able to introduce his young master into the inmost secrets of the place. Nor was Indolence behind his comrade. The authorities of the city had already given a certain amount of information; the pleasures of the feast and the drinking-party, the ecstatic excitement of the gambling-house and the race-course, the satisfaction of every elegant taste, whether for sweet sounds or delightful sights—in short, every pleasure of the senses, which could be gratified without offending public decency—were openly and fully met by the Ministry of Public Pleasure, and Inconstant enjoyed the opportunities thus provided far more than was good for him. Each and all had their turn with him, and each day the wheel of life went round faster and still more fast. But his friends could also show him still further and more hidden scenes, which the City Council, though it tolerated and even privately supported, could not acknowledge openly. Compared to these, the open and public amusements were but tame and spiritless affairs, and Inconstant had soon learned to consider them so, and to take his part to the full in the more advanced company of secret pleasure-seekers.

It may, therefore, be easily believed that the prospect of being handed over at any moment to the grasp of Captain Death was anything but satisfactory to the young man. And another element was also being gradually added to his reluctance to accede to the robber's demands. The beauty of Pulchella had made a deep impression upon him. Even in the midst of the most mad excesses, the

remembrance of it came continually before him, and acted to some extent as a restraining influence. Further than this, Dr. Sapo's house was ever open to him, and the society of its mistress at his disposal. He found that beauty of the outward form was in her case united with strength of understanding and sweetness of disposition. Sometimes he even said, "I will tear myself at once from my present companions, and give myself to worthier pleasures with this beautiful and gracious creature for my life-companion." But again he hesitated. He was young; if only he could escape the decimation of that fell lottery, life lay bright and long before him. He could do all this by-and-bye. For the present, therefore, he would go on as he was; enjoy his life and the company of his friends, and meanwhile occasionally refresh himself with such lessons of pure affection in the Archelder's mansion as might prepare him to enjoy the more quiet and, perchance, more enduring delights of a domestic life hereafter. Thus he reasoned—if, indeed, he reasoned at all. Unhappily, whenever he reasoned, he could not but take into account the black mail due to Death. And even to think of this chilled him to the very core of his heart.

It would have chilled him the more had he known the exact truth. His name and condition had already been discussed in the hostile camp; his determination to evade, if possible, the fulfilment of the compact had been already reported, and Captain Death had resolved on his destruction. The plot against him had even advanced further

than this. The execution of their captain's wishes had been secretly entrusted to two of Death's most faithful servants, named Danger and Disease. In the disguise of travellers these two had entered the city, and there, changing their dress, had applied for and obtained positions in Inconstant's own household.

All this was accomplished with the more ease that these two ruffianly outcasts were no new hands in their bloody business. Danger had learned, by the experience of innumerable assassinations, every trick of the dagger and other cowardly weapons; while Disease was skilled in all secret poisons, and could watch an opportunity with the patience and the ferocity of a wild beast. On this occasion, it was agreed between them that Danger should make the first attempt, and that the method employed by him should be midnight assassination.

To this there was an obstacle in the presence of Conscience, who, all unseen by the other members of the household, but visible to the eyes of Danger and Disease, still slept across the threshold of his old master's chamber, although he never dared to approach him, nor to reveal himself to him. So long as Conscience lay there, it was clear that the attempt was hopeless, and nothing could be done but to watch for his departure.

Inconstant's own folly soon brought this about. Returning one night half-intoxicated from some haunt of impurity, and about to enter his chamber, the young man by accident drew from his breast a small picture of Pul-

chella. It fell on the ground, and shivered into fragments. The fall aroused him, and sobered him in an instant. Lifting the broken fragments to his lips, he bewailed his unworthiness of the beautiful original. In a moment, Conscience was before him. He deemed it a favourable opportunity for entreaty.

"Oh! my master," cried the faithful servant, "why despair? Fly with me from this terrible city, and despair no more."

But the good man had miscalculated his powers, and the extent of his master's sorrow. Inconstant at once recovered himself, and, supposing Conscience to be a phantom, cried aloud for help. In an instant a multitude of servants ran in, seized the aged servant, and would, perchance, have done him some serious injury.

But this Inconstant would not permit. "Hence, misguided man," said he, with an assumption of dignity; "I thought to have seen thee no more, reminder of my former miserable existence. Take him without the city, and set his face Zionwards. And let him thank me that he suffers no more."

To all this Conscience replied not a word, and while Vanity and Pride hurried him off at once between them, Inconstant passed onwards to his chamber. The rest of the servants appeared at first to disperse. But two of them remained, still on the watch outside Inconstant's door. At length a deep quiet stole over all the mansion, and the sound of heavy breathing from within told that the master himself was sleeping.

Then the two who had remained came forward out of the shadow in which they had been long standing.

"Now," said Disease to Danger (for it was they who had thus lurked behind), "the coast is clear. I will watch outside, while you can do your work within."

Danger nodded assent, drew a dagger from a concealed pocket, felt carefully along its edge, tightened his belt around his waist, and stealthily entered into the sleeper's presence.



CHAP. IX.

A GLEAM OF BETTER DAYS TO COME.

Inconstant was sleeping heavily as Danger crept softly to his bedside. One hand lay on the coverlid, clasp- ing the broken glass of Pulchella's picture, and the other supported his head. It may have been that he was dream- ing of the days of youth and innocence, for a sweet smile hovered round his lips, and in the dim light of the shaded lamp which burned at the foot of his couch, his eyelashes gleamed with recent tears.

Danger, however, was not to be turned from his fell purpose by any such indications. Stepping noiselessly over the thickly felted carpet, he drew near to the bed- side, and lifting his weaponed hand, hung over the sleeper, pondering for a moment where best to strike.

But the stroke thus meditated was never destined to descend. Suddenly the arms of the assassin were drawn backwards, a bright light shone around him, and before he had time even to utter a cry, he found himself at the feet of Watchful, disarmed and helpless. He would have



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called out, but the angel's finger was on his lips, a stern look in his eyes, and the assassin's own dagger in his right hand. Danger rightly judged that it was no time for resistance. Rising in terror from the ground, he suffered himself to be led forth without a sound into a further chamber, and thence along a corridor into the open air. Here Watchful turned round and addressed him for the first time. "Begone, thou murderer," said he, "begone to thy master and tell him that this is a charmed life. Not until the destined time shall come, can such a one as thy master snatch away my Master's son. Begone!"

Danger slunk away, in truth regarding his escape as something wonderful; and Watchful, returning to the chamber, found Inconstant still sleeping. Awhile he bent over him, murmuring soft words of pity, and flushing the sleeper's cheek with his fragrant breath; then, being assured that he was still unharmed, he quietly opened the casement, spread his arms as though they had been wings, and floated upward towards the quiet stars.

But the sleep of Inconstant, although it seemed at first thus tranquil, ceased to be so after awhile. He tossed upon the couch from side to side, muttered incoherent words, lifted his hands as if to shield his head, and at length awoke with the sweat breaking in heavy drops upon his forehead, crying out for help upon his attendants, and finding his bed surrounded by them.

"Where am I?" were the young man's first words.

"Your lordship is safe in your own chamber," answered

Mr. Brain (now the steward of the mansion), who had run in with the rest of the household, on hearing his master's cries.

"I dreamed that I was in the hands of murderers; nay, I can scarce believe now that it is not so," replied the young man. "An assassin stood over me, and I tried to save myself, but could not. Ah! it must have been that villain whom I thought I saw last night—I mean Conscience; or was that also a dream?"

"We took off a mean-looking person last night at your own direction, my lord," answered Pride. "He was found lurking in the passages, and you ordered him to be set outside the city-gates. I am ashamed to say, that somehow or other he disappeared outside the house, and escaped us."

"No doubt, then, he returned, and endeavoured to assassinate me," cried Inconstant. "Keep careful watch, good Mr. Brain, lest the scoundrel should return. Cause strict search to be also made at once, lest he should still be about the dwelling. And now send for Master Lust to come and sit with me until the dawn, for I much dread being alone."

But neither Lust nor Indolence could now be found, and, therefore, the under-steward, one Mr. Sensible, was ordered into the chamber, and remained awhile with his master until it was time to arise. This Mr. Sensible was one of the best members of Inconstant's household. Like Mr. Brain, he had come in the original company from the village of Wordly-Mindedness, and although destitute of

any pretensions to piety, took a shrewd and straightforward view of his duties. He had never looked with favour upon his master's excesses in the more doubtful pleasures of Earthly-Delight, but yet had not thought it his place to speak concerning them. Nor had Inconstant cared to converse with the old man (for he was now gray-headed), deeming him almost beneath his notice. But now, as he sat by his bedside in the advancing night, and as sleep refused to return, Inconstant thought it might be as well to exchange a few words. Thus the conversation began :—

“I cannot after all think, Mr. Sensible, that it was old Conscience who attempted my life. He loved me well, I verily believe.”

“I think so also, my lord,” said Mr. Sensible. “Conscience has been many years known to me by reputation, although not in person; and I have always heard him well spoken of. You may have other worse enemies, my lord.”

“And what dost thou mean by other enemies?” enquired Inconstant, in a tone of some curiosity. “Dost thou mean our common foe, this Captain Death?”

“Nay, my lord, I did not think of him. He is the enemy to all of us, and not to you more than to another. I thought it possible that—that some who call themselves your friends should be somewhat distrusted.”

“Some who call themselves my friends?” enquired Inconstant, wonderingly, and raising himself on his elbow as he lay, so as to look Mr. Sensible full in the face. “The Archelder?”

Mr. Sensible shook his head.

"I thought not," said Inconstant, with a sigh of relief. "We all know he cares little for anything but himself. Still, he is not a traitor. But if not he, of whom dost thou speak? Is the deceiver, then, a member of my own household?"

"I dare not tell you, my lord."

"Come, come, Mr. Sensible," cried the young man, now thoroughly aroused, and changing to a tone of persuasion; "tell me this, I entreat thee. Have I not ever been a good master to thee since we met?"

"We have not met much, my lord," replied the servant, "and yet I will not complain of your dealings with me. But when suspicion is mere suspicion, to give it words is wrong. Besides, it might get me into trouble."

"Then here I pledge thee my solemn promise," cried Inconstant, "that I will not betray thee, good Mr. Sensible. Whisper the name to me, and I will say no more. Whom dost thou suspect of designs upon my life?"

Mr. Sensible, thus pressed, felt compelled to speak. "My lord," he began falteringly, "you have two close friends and companions—"

"Masters Lust and Indolence? No, no. I cannot believe that they are traitors. And yet I know not," continued Inconstant, almost to himself. "Friend Lust has often left me much lately, and his company has by no means been so gay as heretofore."

Sensible saw his advantage, and pushed it.

"Even so, my lord. Let me respectfully advise you to enquire of Mr. Brain touching the dealings of these two gentlemen with your property."

"I will do so," said his master. "But come, tell me anything thou knowest of thyself. I can hardly believe that these my friends would do me harm. I pray thee speak, and fear not."

But the old servant could not be got to say more. Nor, indeed, was it necessary; enough had been already said to rouse Inconstant's suspicions, and he instantly caused search to be made for his missing friends. The search was vain. Whether terrified at the tumult, or, perchance, having made their preparations beforehand, is unknown, but neither the one nor the other of the two villains could now be found. Nor was this all. Mr. Brain, his tongue being set free by their absence, could explain it well. A vast quantity of Inconstant's treasure had evidently disappeared, and it seemed probable enough that the missing gentlemen had taken it along with them. But the steward was also not at all loth to point to his accounts, and sigh over the sums which had with their help been squandered in company with his lord. Probably he alone could really tell how much of the treasure which had come from Zion Towers had passed through the hands of the runaways into the clutches of the gamesters, the drink-merchants, and the abandoned characters of the city; even if they had not carried off a considerable portion to assist them in their flight.

All this being considered, the attempt upon Inconstant's life was at length set down, although wrongly, to his two former friends, and, they being now gone altogether out of reach, both the course of his life took a somewhat different turn, and Disease, who still remained in the household undetected and even unsuspected, had full opportunity for making a further attempt to carry out his master's designs.

CHAP. X.

THE MARRIAGE OF INCONSTANT AND PULCHELLA.

The losses which the conduct of Inconstant's two unfaithful friends had entailed upon him proved to be much larger than had been expected. It became necessary somewhat to diminish the outgoings of household expenditure, and to refrain from the exciting but expensive pleasures into which the young man had at first plunged without restriction. It was also soon evident that the bodily health of the lord of the manor was not that which it had been at the outset of his career in the city of Earthly-Delight. The nights of intoxicating amusement, prolonged almost into the following day; the days of luxury and revelry by which the nights were ushered in; the rack of unchecked passion, and the unnatural strain on every bodily power, had already begun to show clear traces of their working, even upon Inconstant's sinewy and well-balanced frame. To which was to be added that Disease had now got himself appointed to assist Vanity and Pride about the young lord's person, and, as opportunity served, dropped into the

sleeping-potion, which his master now drank nightly to soothe his shattered senses, a drop or two of a subtle and deadly essence, in the preparation of which he was fatally skilled. More than this he dared not at present attempt, lest detection should result ; yet enough he still contrived to do, to work little by little towards his fatal purpose.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sensible, to whom Inconstant rightly considered that he owed much, became his master's frequent companion. At his suggestions, the hitherto despised professors of the College of Intellectual Pleasures were summoned to Sweet-Meadows, and held long conferences with its owner. His magnificent museum, library, and apparatus, so long neglected, were now remembered and largely used. The lovely gardens around the mansion, hitherto forsaken in favour of the Public Pleasure-Ground, and the gay Kursaal of the city, now began to afford him, so far as his health permitted, fresh and comparatively innocent delight. The performance of his public duties, as the chief person in the city, also filled up another portion of his time somewhat agreeably, and he became a still more regular attendant than ever at the services of the great Temple of Self.

It must be confessed, however, that his attendance on these last duties was not entirely owing to his personal enjoyment of them, nor to any particular delight derived from the orations of Dr. Sapo. These continued to be as clever, as telling, as light-hearted and as satisfactory to most

of their hearers as before. But they afforded very little comfort to Inconstant. Circumstances had somewhat sobered him; he had become thoughtful; and, as before, two subjects chiefly filled his thoughts—the lottery, in which his name might at any time be drawn as one of the victims for Captain Death—and a yearning for some pure and true affection, which might replace the loss of that of his two former friends. The young man's heart had never been made of adamant. After a certain sense, he had loved even his Father and his brother, in the old home in Zion Towers—or rather he might have loved them, had not his wicked friends drawn his love away. But now the men, who had once professed to be most faithful to him, had themselves proved faithless and had departed, nor were there any to take their place. Vanity and Pride were but servants; old Sensible was after all too old and too cold, too prosaic and practical; in short not of the stuff of which warm friends were made. The Arch-elder himself, smiling and genial, mellow-voiced and tender-palmed though he was, yet failed to give his younger friend an opportunity of drawing into nearer friendship, and Inconstant began to perceive that he was one of those affable persons, not uncommon, who at once become most friendly with their companions, and then advance no further.

Casting about, therefore, under these circumstances, and considering many things, Inconstant determined that it would be well for him to marry, and that the one who could

make him happy as a wife was Pulchella. It was this, in short, which took him thus regularly to the Temple services. The construction of the building, as already explained, did not, indeed, permit of his meeting with the Archelder's daughter there, nor even of his seeing her; but, at the conclusion of the worship, it became the young man's custom to visit the palace hard-by, and there to make himself more and more acquainted with the Archelder's beautiful daughter.

It is not to be supposed that Dr. Sapo was at all unobservant or ignorant of Inconstant's intention. So far from this, he secretly rejoiced, and offered every facility for these visits. It was true that Inconstant's health was to some degree shattered, nor was his wealth what it had been. Nevertheless, his position was the highest possible in the city, his fortune was still large, his health might improve, he showed every disposition to uphold the institutions of the city, and he was still an enthusiastic follower of that which the Archelder professed to regard as the true religion. "Pulchella and Inconstant: wherefore not?" thought the wary Archelder to himself; and so, unobtrusively and yet decidedly, he did all in his power to promote the alliance.

The question, therefore, lay with Pulchella herself, and by her it was soon solved. She sat in one of the smaller open courts of her father's palace, hidden by the shade of a porch from the mid-day sun. In the midst of the court was a tiny garden; its central ornament a fountain of a

single slender jet, rising and falling in the sunshine with a musical monotony. In one hand was some unfinished piece of woman's work, but she was doing nothing to complete it. Her graceful head was poised upon the unoccupied hand, and her dark eyes were bent thoughtfully on the fountain. On a somewhat lower seat, and drinking in her loveliness with all his eyes, sate Inconstant.

Not seldom does conversation play awhile around the subject most at heart, as the bee round the flower, before he enters in. It was so now.

"Why should the fountain rise and fall thus?" Pulchella was asking. "Why not remain continually the same? Thou who art so wise, tell me."

"Nay, Pulchella," replied the young man, "I must ask some of my learned professors before I can reply. But I will answer thee with another question. Wherefore do we also rise and fall?"

"And who has told thee that I rise and fall, my lord Inconstant? I rise indeed, but the falling I will leave to thee."

Inconstant realised too well the meaning of her words.

"There thou speakest truly, Pulchella," said he, sighing as he spoke. "Still, if I have fallen, I see one way of rising again."

"And what may be that one way, my lord?" enquired the girl, hesitatingly.

"Look at the fountain again, Pulchella. See, it drops suddenly, nearly to the ground. But see again, it

rise. For there comes a fresh supply of waters into its life."

"And whence can new waters come into our lives?" said the girl. "Forms live and die, like the drops of yonder fountain; but the lives that come after us are not our own."

"Listen to me, Pulchella," rejoined the young man, drawing nearer as he spoke, "hear some of the story of my falling, and how I hope to rise again."

"Alas! do not I know most of it already?"

"Something, perchance, but not all," replied Inconstant. "Thou knowest my story in some degree; whence I am, what I am, one who has renounced his old home, and has taken up the citizenship and the ways of this thy beautiful city. And, perchance, thou knowest that I have not spent my time here in wise or in pure occupations. But thou can'st not fully know how unworthy of thy true regard he who addresses thee really is."

"Alas! my lord Inconstant, I know too much of this. We of this place live but for the day, I know, but much have I lamented that some of those whom I esteem should spend that little day unworthily."

"And hast thou already in thy heart despised Inconstant for a mere pleasure-seeker, Pulchella?" said Inconstant, anxiously.

Pulchella said nothing: but her eyes turned from the fountain and bent themselves upon the mosaic pattern of the pavement at her feet.

"It is not so, then?" cried the young man, taking courage, and his voice beginning to tremble. "Then hear me to the end, and give me an answer to what I shall ask. I have, indeed, misspent my time and talents here; I have lost much of my fortune; I have trusted to unworthy friends, who have left me, and now am I continually borne down by a dread of some indefinable calamity. Yet I think that I am born for better things, and that there is a way of escape even for me."

Here Inconstant paused. But Pulchella still said nothing. Only she took the unfinished work into both her hands, and began again upon it.

"Pulchella," went on Inconstant, bending forward and laying his hand upon the embroidery frame as if to prevent her occupation, and bespeak her attention, "I see, indeed, a way of escape. I see a happy home, made happy by the presence of one whom I shall regard as another self; I see myself kept in the path of honour by her gentle and yet firm influence; I see a husband returning from the discharge of public duties to the companionship of a loving and beloved wife. Ah! Pulchella, thou readest me; I can see the blush deepening on thy cheek. Canst thou, durst thou—knowing what I have been—give me the hope of being so blessed?"

"If only I could trust thee, my lord?" murmured the Archelder's daughter, lifting her dark eyes for one moment, and letting them rest on Inconstant. "But thou hast changed before, and thou wilt change again."

"Not until death," cried the young man—and the words seemed to find an echo; for the fountain shivered and fell.

But Pulchella seemed to take no note of this. She sat in silence, her hands moving mechanically over the embroidery frame, but her thoughts elsewhere. Then at last, she stood up facing her companion, and averting her eyes from him, held forth her hand.

"My lord!" said she, "I will trust thee. Life is short enough and sad enough, even with the companionship of one we love: but what is it without? I will trust thee; oh! deceive me not."

Thus the lives of Inconstant and Pulchella flowed into one.

The city of Earthly-Delight was speedily acquainted with the results of this important conversation. Indeed, Inconstant and the Archelder vied with each other in ensuring the sympathy of their fellow-citizens for their proposed alliance. It was arranged that the day of the marriage should be kept as a general holiday, and all the principal citizens were to partake of a public banquet in the Kursaal Gardens, under the presidency of the Lord Provost. The whole city was to be illuminated, festivals and amusements of every description to be provided at the Lord of the Manor's expense, even on a far more extended scale than had ever yet been known, and a magnificent painted window was to be erected in the great Temple, to commemorate for ever this happy union. Sweet-Meadows

itself was to be re-arranged with a view to the reception of a mistress, and there was even some talk of sending to Zion Towers for a ratification of the new alliance. But to this the Archelder, the Lord Provost, and many others—nay, even Pulchella herself—objected. The city of Earthly-Delight needed, in their opinion, no countenance from a distant and altogether alien territory. Let my lord Inconstant rejoice in the delights which he had, and be contented to let dangerous recollections and relationships remain undisturbed.

So the marriage came off without further reference to Zion Towers. Pulchella passed from the palace of her father to the mansion of her husband, the loveliest and the tenderest of brides. Beautiful was she as Inconstant had first seen her, but as she stood beside him on their marriage morning, flushed with all the brilliancy of hopeful anticipations, and yet softened by a sweet reserve, how inexpressibly more beautiful! Tender had she been, so far as pure maidens may be tender, but Inconstant had not fathomed Pulchella's tenderness before she called herself his wife. And so nothing was wanting to their felicity. Nothing? Alas! yes; there was something wanting—it was the blessing of the Father whose love Inconstant had cast behind him.

And even on the marriage day, there were also two slight, yet not unimportant, matters for discontent. Pulchella, with her attendant maidens, was being conducted around the various chambers of her future home. Into one

room she hardly cared as yet to look : it was her lord's private study and retiring-chamber. Awhile she paused at the door, and then, gently opening it, looked timidly in. To her surprise, the room was occupied. A man, having his back towards the door, was pouring something into a cup which stood on the table, and doing it in a way which at once told her feminine instinct that the deed was wrong. Roused by the noise of her entrance, the person turned, changed colour to a deadly paleness, then hastily passed her, and rushed quickly away.

The cup still stood upon the table. Pulchella took it up, and even tasted its contents, but observed nothing to cause suspicion. Still, she thought well to take it to her husband, and tell him all she had seen. Then the truth came out. It was Disease whom Pulchella had detected at last at his fatal work. Happy wife ! thus early to have preserved her husband ; and yet unhappy wife, thus early to find traitors in her own home !

This had been one incident. The other was yet more important. It occurred at the public banquet. In the midst of the festivities, a messenger had brought a sealed missive to the Lord Provost, who opened it, and then gravely passed it to the Town Clerk and the Archelder, who sat beside him.

The writing of the letter was in an unknown hand, and ran thus—*Let not the festivities be unduly prolonged ; Captain Death intends this night to commence a general assault on the city. From a secret, but true, Friend.*

CHAP. XI.

CAPTAIN DEATH LAYS SIEGE TO EARTHLY-DELIGHT.

The citizens of Earthly-Delight have so often made sad experience of the prowess and skill of their chief enemy, that the news of his intended assault upon their walls did not take them altogether by surprise. Nevertheless, the banquet at once broke up in some confusion, and no sooner were the leaders of the city thus set at liberty, than they hurried off to make themselves personally acquainted with the true state of affairs.

The arrangement and plan of the city have been already described. It lies on a peninsula, surrounded by the burning river Sin, except at one point, where an ancient road issues forth in the direction of Zion Towers. This road, however, has long been blocked up, a broad ditch having been dug across it, fitted with flood-gates, so that at any time the city may be easily made into an island. It might, therefore, be supposed that the defence of the city is complete. But this is not the case, owing to the many irregularities in the breadth of the surrounding river. In

some places this stream is broad and entirely impassable, but in other places, although deep and rapid, it is extremely narrow. Such is the case at that part of the circuit which lies between Touching Gate and Tasting Gate, where is found the Long Esplanade of the Public Gardens, and where, indeed, the walls cannot be built close to the river's bank, owing to the depth and rapidity of the water, and the treacherous nature of the soil. Hence, the defences of the city at this point are far from satisfactory.

Captain Death was as well aware of the weakness of Earthly-Delight on this side as its own townsmen, and in most of his assaults upon it, he had planned his first attack from this direction. He had now taken advantage of the public distraction, caused by Inconstant's marriage, to throw light bridges across the stream in this quarter, and to occupy in some force the gardens close under the walls on the city side of the river. When he had once crossed, the very height and strength of the walls at this point protected him from the citizens themselves, and skilful marksmen had been stationed on the opposite side of the river to prevent any attempt to man the walls, and thus hurl destruction down from them upon his advanced guard. In such an attempt, several soldiers were at once shot down at the Lord Provost's side, and other members of the party of observation had in the same manner the narrowest escape for their lives.

But the actual seizure of the Public Gardens of the city was soon ascertained to be only one of the plans.

adopted by the robber-chieftain who now attacked Earthly-Delight. The dwellers in the district immediately around the city speedily began to flock in across the bridges, bringing the news that their homes had been occupied, and their property devastated by the captain's troops. Indeed, looking out on the surrounding country from any of the taller towers of the city, many evidences of the determined nature of the assault which was now commenced were plainly visible. The circle of the enemy's watch-fires might be seen in all directions, the tops of the hills were plainly occupied by his forces, and even the sound of his trumpets might from time to time be clearly heard.

This condition of affairs was evidently no time for either trifling or delay. The very morrow of Inconstant's marriage found him presiding at a council, in which the situation of matters was carefully discussed. What little preparations could be made at once had been made even before the council met. The gates had been barricaded, the bridges guarded, and orders had been issued by the Lord Provost to the captains of each of the city wards to send in an account of all the men available for defence, and (as far as possible) a statement of the quantity of provisions in the ward. But the result of all this was by no means reassuring. It was found that very many of the inhabitants were entirely unfitted for military service, having been weakened by luxurious living and unnerved by continual dissipation. It was further found that little or no ammunition had been provided, and but a slender stock

of arms or weapons of any kind, so that even such as were able-bodied had small hope of coping with the merciless bravery of the enemy's soldiery, and the complete apparatus for war by which they were supported. Lastly, the public store-houses, although provided abundantly with the more delicate and luxurious sorts of provisions, were but poorly supplied with solid articles of substantial food.

The council sate long and late, to ponder these sombre statements, and to determine upon some course of action. One of the principal and most anxious subjects for consideration was the appointment of a commander. The post was offered at first to the Archelder, but he at once excused himself. "His duties were to offer up supplications for the safety of the city, and to counsel others, so far as he might be able. He was a man of peace, and not of war." The Lord Provost was equally unwilling—the Minister of Public Pleasure happened to be sick and confined to his bed. The Town Clerk was willing to take a secondary responsibility, but not the highest.

Inconstant would have offered, but that he felt himself to be unfit; and further, he remembered that he was a bridegroom. Nevertheless, he ventured to hint at taking the command. But then it became clear, that although, for form's sake and for custom's sake, the officials of the city were prepared to accept their young Lord of the Manor as a nominal head, they were by no means prepared to trust him with their lives.

"Nay, my lord," replied the Lord Provost to Incon-

stant's somewhat hesitating suggestion, "your lordship's life is too valuable, and you may do your fellow citizens better service in other ways. I fear that we must send for old Gospeller again. That is, if Dr. Sapo does not altogether object."

The Archelder bit his lips, but remained silent.

"Who is this Gospeller?" enquired Inconstant.

"He is by trade, my lord, a teacher of the young," answered Sir Practical. "But on one or two occasions before this, when this same Captain Death has nearly overwhelmed our city, this man has shown great skill in assisting to defeat him. We should probably have employed him to organise our soldiers regularly, but for his wild and impracticable religious opinions."

"And what may these opinions be?" said Inconstant.

"Truly I do not altogether understand them, my lord," replied the Lord Provost. "He belongs, I believe, to that extinct sect, whose religion was once professed in this city. You may remember a sentence which stands over the gate by which you entered, and that you enquired concerning it. Now, that sentence was taken from the sacred book of the sect to which old Gospeller still belongs."

"Ah! I remember the circumstance well," said Inconstant; "and has the book any particular title?"

"Indeed, I forget," was the Lord Provost's reply. "Such things make little or no impression on my mind."

"The book is called the Book of the Divine Will,"

broke out the Archelder. "Nor do I object to Mr. Gospeller having his own opinion, but he is one of those who wants everyone else to think as he does, and cannot be satisfied unless he turns the rest of the world upside down, as well as himself."

Meanwhile Inconstant had pricked up his ears. "The Book of the Divine Will!" cried he, "and do they read that volume here also?"

"Some few, I fear, profess still to do so," said Dr. Sapo, "and the more fools they. However, this is not a time to enquire too closely into a man's religion. The question is—can he lead our soldiers? If he can, I for one shall make no objection to his trying his hand in our extremity."

Mr. Gospeller was, therefore, at once sent for. Having heard him called "Old," Inconstant expected to see an aged and infirm man. But Mr. Gospeller was but little past middle life, and probably owed his title to the gravity and quietude of his manner. In person, and in the fashion of his garments, he reminded one much of Presbyter, although, perchance, his manner was not so dignified, and his language not so carefully chosen.

"Good day, Mr. Gospeller!" said the Lord Provost (whom Inconstant had deputed to carry on the conversation), "we have met again under painful circumstances. Pray be seated, and hear what we have to say."

"I would rather remain standing, my Lord Provost," replied Gospeller "I desire not in any way to be joined

to this congregation, nor for even a short space to sit in the seat of the scornful."

"As thou pleasest, then," replied Sir Practical, sullenly, "but at any rate hear what we have to say."

"I already know well, gentlemen," answered Gospeller, respectfully but firmly, "what you need of me. You desire me to take command of your military defence. By the criminal neglect of the authorities of the city in which we dwell, this city has been brought well nigh to destruction. Instead of labour, we have had nought but feasting and pleasure; instead of defence, the city treasure has been lavished on transitory delights; instead of vigour and earnestness in the citizens, sensualities and vice have been fostered; instead of worshipping the God of Heaven, ye have worshipped the demon Self, who can neither help nor deliver."

"Come, come," remonstrated the Archelder, "this is not what we want to hear. If thou art determined to sermonize the council this way, I shall have to talk on the other side. Let bygones be bygones, and look the present in the face."

"I am so looking, my lord Archelder," replied Gospeller. "You require me to take the defence of the city in hand, as I have done before this. Now, that this may be done, we must first see whether there are any real sources of defence. Unhappily, I fear much that in herself the city has none."

"None!" exclaimed Inconstant.

"None, my lord," was Gospeller's reply. "Your lordship is but fresh in these parts, but I am well experienced in this matter. There is but one method of defence for Earthly-Delight, when Captain Death makes his assaults, and that is the method we have used before."

"And what is that?" demanded Inconstant.

"It is this, my lord. The other members of the council hardly need that I should tell them. Neither I nor any other human general can save you. We must abandon all the outlying posts and outer walls of the city to the enemy—indeed, he already holds the Public Gardens, and will soon press on, and seize the rest; we must collect our townsmen, our provisions, and our small amount of arms into the citadel, and there defending ourselves and holding out as best we may, we must send an embassy to the Master of Zion Towers, the proper owner of this country, and beseech his help."

"We will never do it! never! never!" cried the Archelder, rising from his seat in inexpressible wrath. "Begone from this council chamber, thou recreant dog—" and with this he was for making an assault upon Mr. Gospeller, but in his haste he stumbled, fell heavily against the corner of the city-deed chest (which stood in the council chamber), was picked up senseless, and had to be carried to his home.

After this, a deep silence fell on the rest of the council. Inconstant dared not speak. Whoever might send for help to Zion Towers, he could not dream either of himself

undertaking such an application, or of receiving a favourable answer to it, if undertaken. Nor were the other members of the council much more anxious than he to take part in such a measure. Many of them had been runaways from the service of Zion Towers, among whom might be mentioned Aldermen Dives and Demas, Mr. Councillor Formalist, Professor Philosophus and others. The Lord Provost himself almost held his office on account of his attachment to what had been considered the independence of the city; and the Town Clerk, although he had never meddled much in politics, had done his best to second the efforts of the chief magistrate.

However, Mr. Gospeller held firm to his text. He pointed out at greater length and even more decidedly than before the hopelessness of endeavouring to defend the whole of the city circuit, the want of weapons on their part, and the completeness of all the preparations on the part of their adversary. He produced his copy of The Book of the Divine Will, and declared from it that the Master of Zion Towers was one in whose merciful consideration the citizens might confidently trust. Finally, he offered to disguise himself as a beggar, and so endeavour himself to make his way through the enemy's lines, and plead their cause personally at Zion Towers.

This last offer decided the matter. It was generally felt that the risk would be Mr. Gospeller's, and the advantage all on the side of the city. Some, indeed, might have preferred an application to King Abaddon. But then the

questions arose: Who was to go? What means of communication had they with the king? and was there any record of his having at previous times sent assistance? And seeing that to these questions there was no reply, and that the way in the other direction was pretty clear, it was at last unanimously agreed to follow Mr. Gospeller's advice, both as to what had to be done in the city itself, and as to using him for an ambassador. Mr. Ingenuity even proposed that a document should be drawn up, signed by the city officials, and guaranteed by the city seal, and that the ambassador should carry this with him. But Mr. Gospeller declined to carry it with him, and soon afterwards, having conferred again with the council, and having taken their pledge that the affairs of the city should be arranged during his absence in the way he had advised, he set forth on his merciful but dangerous errand.

CHAP. XII.

INCONSTANT LOSES HIS POSSESSIONS IN EARTHLY-DELIGHT.

The citadel of the city of Earthly-Delight is not marked out by any conspicuous fortifications, nor so constructed as to be noticed by a casual observer. But when the city was planned by the engineers of King Abaddon, now many years since, the question was fully gone into, and an inner line of defence was carefully prepared. This line includes the great square, the Archelder's palace, the Temple, the principal provision-stores, and some other of the public buildings, all of which are so constructed as to resist any attempt to fire them from without. It excludes all the Public Pleasure-grounds, the Kursaal, the residences of the higher classes, and the site of Inconstant's dwelling, Sweet-Meadows.

Within this line of defence a large portion of the citizens not long afterwards retreated, carrying with them what they could of their property (it was but little, at the best, which they could thus transfer), and in most cases leaving behind them the sick, the aged, and the less able-bodied.

The policy and religion of the city, alas! are not of a nature to teach clemency or tenderness, and the order of the day, when any great danger arises, naturally is,—every one for himself, and let who will take the hindermost. Hence, in this extremity, husbands and wives, friends and friends, children and parents, parted asunder, to meet no more. Those who were thought able to do something for the common defence, were accorded permission to enter the citadel: those on the other hand who were supposed to be practically worthless for this purpose, were unsparingly left behind, to experience the tender mercies of Captain Death.

The tender mercies of Captain Death! Whatever hopes the poor wretches thus deserted might have entertained with respect to these, were speedily dissipated. No sooner had the captain's vigilant outlookers perceived that the city walls were no longer manned, than measures were immediately taken for their occupation. The river was at once crossed, not merely by the bridges, but at a hundred other points, and the walls were soon in possession of the enemy. From the points of vantage thus obtained, fiery missiles were then rained in upon the exposed parts of the city, and in a short time it was reduced to a mass of ashes and crumbling ruins. Where but lately had been lovely and picturesque gardens, rich warehouses, gorgeous dwelling-houses, exquisitely adorned edifices of pleasure and religion, and broad streets filled with gay and luxurious crowds, now reigned desolation and destruction in their

most hideous forms. The sick man, left behind, was burned in his bed: the aged and infirm were either buried amongst the ruins of their homes, or here and there skulked about in cellars and other hiding-places, in a state of half-starvation, and expecting every moment the coming of the enemy: the bodies of deserted children, famished or shot through by the enemy's missiles, lay in heaps by the wayside, where foul animals batten upon them. Such were the plan and policy of the relentless enemy who now attacked Earthly-Delight: to clear the ground completely around the last retreat of his foe, and then, having planted his engines of destruction and arranged his forces in the vantage-ground so gained, to make a final and desperate attack upon the citadel itself.

It has been already explained that Inconstant's mansion lay in the comparatively undefended portion of the city—in fact, close to the city wall, which formed one of its boundaries. This circumstance may have had its weight in determining the Lord of the Manor to take up an independent position, and endeavour to make a separate stand for his own home. But other motives were still more powerful. There were many in his household of whom he was by no means certain that they would be allowed access into the city citadel. For them his own innate tenderness, not altogether extinguished, as well as Pulchella's powerful advocacy, pleaded with irresistible power. "It were better," said these united reasoners, "to perish amidst one's own people, than to leave them

to perish and gain safety for oneself." And this was not all. Inconstant was not in the least prepared to accept help from Zion Towers, even if it could be had. His whole soul rose against it. "After all," thought he, "life must end sooner or later, and I would rather that it should end in the brave defence of my possessions than be preserved by assistance from one to whom I am unwilling to render either obedience or respect. No : I have had my portion, and I will do my best to keep it bravely, or to lose it unflinchingly."

So thought Inconstant, secretly urged on by his servant Pride. This man had now obtained great influence with his master, and although really looking after his own interest—for, being now past middle life, he had little expectation that the townsmen would receive him in their own place of retreat—yet he contrived to give his opinions an air of almost entire disinterestedness. Furthermore, as persons generally see what they wish to see, Inconstant was not long in determining that the mansion of Sweet-Meadows might easily be defended. There was large provision of all sorts, a park-wall which might be strengthened, and a strong body of household servants and retainers. "If we lose," said he to Pulchella, "it is true that we lose everything; but if we stand our ground, we gain all." No doubt, in his secret heart, the young man also looked to the relief of the city by help from his Father's possessions, and fancied that, if that event should occur, he would gain all he wanted, and yet keep his independence also.

Thus the besieged citizens of Earthly-Delight separated into two parties—the main body of the townsmen in the central citadel, and Inconstant with his own household defending his own mansion. But Inconstant soon found that, in making this division, he had under-rated the skill of the enemy with whom he had to deal. Captain Death had no sooner occupied the deserted portion of the town, than he seemed inclined to accept the principle of divided interests in a way which the Lord of the Manor had not anticipated, and to take advantage of the weakness produced by separation, with the view of crushing his opponents one by one. Accordingly, while apparently contented with a strict investment of the citadel, so that none should pass in either direction, he brought his utmost forces to bear upon Inconstant's retreat, and night and day wearied him with perpetual assaults. One by one, the sturdiest of the household were disabled or slain ; and, day by day, the sap of the enemy was driven closer to the wall. At last, there could be no doubt that the final assault—an assault which could hardly have anything but a fatal issue—might take place at any moment.

Inconstant felt that to withhold the truth from his wife any longer was a cruel kindness, and roused himself to tell her of the impending ruin.

“Pulchella, O Pulchella, how can I tell thee?”

“And why not speak, dearest husband : what should you know, that I have not a right to know also?”

“Dost thou hear, then—” went on Inconstant, nerving

himself to the task, "dost thou hear the dull sound of those repeated blows? Listen!"

Holding their breath, they listened, and heard as it were repeated strokes of a heavy hammer, striking in the earth beneath their feet.

"It is the sound of the enemy's miners. At any moment, Pulchella, they may spring a mine beneath us, and burst in upon us with a flood of destruction."

"And what then?" said Pulchella, firmly.

"What then?" cried Inconstant, "canst thou ask, what then? Then comes the end—the end, I tell thee—the end of our short but delightful union—the end of all that we promised ourselves—the end of the continual joys which we thought would be ours. O my heart's darling, I would not have cared for ought else; but so soon to part from thee—" and here his voice altogether failed him.

"Dearest Inconstant," sobbed his wife, casting herself upon her husband's bosom, "do not speak thus. Listen to me awhile, and play the man, that I may be helped to say a few short words." And with that she left him, and going to a small cabinet, brought out a little book. Inconstant recognised it, and changed colour. It was the Book of the Divine Will.

"Whence came this?" asked Inconstant, altogether overwhelmed.

"It came from him who is now an ambassador to thy Father—old Gospeller," replied Pulchella. "Before he went, he sent the volume to me, with these words inside the

leaf, 'Thy word is truth,' and then his own name. Dearest husband, have I done wrong to read it? While thou hast been on the battlement of our home, striving to ward off this deadly enemy, I have been studying how to meet him when he shall come. And though my eyes are very dim, and my heart is very hard, yet I hope I have found the way. O that thou wouldst learn it with me! O that—"

"Pulchella," cried the young man, interrupting her, and speaking in a voice broken with emotion, "I would that it might be so for me. But it is too late—all these things have I learned before this, and, having learned them, I have deliberately cast them behind me. Not that I would hinder thee, or stand for one moment in thy light. In this last moment—for, indeed, I think it may be our last—no word shall fall from me to shake thy new-born faith. But, alas! no such faith is possible for thy husband any more. I have signed the writing, and had my portion." And as he spoke, the unhappy young man hid his face between his hands, and gave way to uncontrollable grief.

Pulchella laid her hands on his shoulders, and, kissing his forehead, almost forced him to look up. Then, looking up, he saw her face lightened with a well nigh angelic radiance, and her eyes—though all suffused with tears—yet firm and strong. "Husband dearest," said she, "this is not the End. We may be parted soon by this our foe, and suffer all that he can inflict. But we shall meet again. These weary weeks have taught me, out of that

blessed book, what my father often has tried to hide from me, and what I have ever been yearning after. There is a life beyond—a union of those who love and trust the great God above us, through the way which He Himself has taught us. And thou shalt find this for thyself, my husband, and though we may not see each other in this city of Earthly-Delight, yet when the time . . .”

But Pulchella spoke no more. Passing almost between them, a fiery missile at this instant smote her to the heart, and she fell lifeless at her husband's feet.

Inconstant stood for a moment as one petrified. He had been resigned to lose her, but not so soon nor so terribly. Then, in violent despair, he flung himself on her corpse, and wept aloud.

“Master, master,” said a gentle voice.

But the despairing husband took no heed.

“Master, master,” repeated the same voice, still more gently, but yet with a commanding tone. Then Inconstant arose, and yielding to an almost unconscious feeling, suffered himself to be led by the owner of the voice out of the chamber into the gardens of the mansion. Thus leading him, his guide passed through a dark and lengthened passage, and still onwards, until the fresh open air was again reached. Once more the guide went forward, until they reached the open country. Then Inconstant sank exhausted. As he fell, a concussion shook the very ground, and a bright light illuminated the air. He looked back, and saw Sweet-Meadows wrapped in flames from the basement.

to the roof. The mine had evidently been sprung. Pulchella had after all been saved from a more hideous end.

"And who art thou?" feebly muttered the young man, turning his weary eyes upon his guide. He was but a simple-looking youth, in plain apparel, and of undistinguished bearing.

"I am thy servant Watchful," was the reply.



CHAP. XIII.

INCONSTANT MAKES A NEW DEPARTURE.

Wearied out with toil and excessive emotion, Inconstant had sunk to sleep, and, when he awoke, even many hours elapsed before he thoroughly realised the change in his position. He could hardly understand that he had been but a short time since in the possession of all that the world holds valuable, the lord of houses and lands, of place, money, and power, the husband of a tender wife, and with every prospect of a lofty and happy career. Not exactly in a moment, and yet with unexampled rapidity, had all these things passed from him. Many of them, it is true, he had shamefully wasted—so much he was willing to confess—but most had been violently taken from him. Could it be that old Presbyter was after all right when he was speaking of “a short pleasure with a sharp ending?”

To divert the melancholy of his thoughts, Inconstant at length looked around him. His guide had disappeared, and where he was he knew not. In all directions spread a wide common, tinged for the most part with the purple hue

of the bursting heath, but diversified here and there with the blackness of reedy pools, and the yellow gleam of sand-hills. On all sides undulating ground shut in the horizon. Long shadows of the clouds swept gaily across the foreground, and the breeze which bore them played amongst the young man's tresses, and seemed to his heated fancy to enjoy an unwonted freedom. Innumerable heath-flowers were springing at his feet, the bees and the butterflies were toying from blossom to blossom, the grasshoppers were chattering among the blades of grass, while myriads of living creatures, some in gaudy and some in sober garb, peopled the air around, and made it vocal with a melody beyond the setting of any human musician.

This calm, which nevertheless was the calm of life and not of death,—this sweetness and freshness of the free countryside, could not but powerfully affect the jaded spirits of Inconstant. "How sweet would it be," thought he, "to dwell in such a wilderness!" And so thinking, he looked about him more intently. Might there not be some shelter, which he could adapt to the purpose of at least a temporary lodging?

The event justified his expectation. Not far from where he lay stood a rude cottage, from the chimney of which a slender stream of smoke was issuing; but no other sign of human life could be seen far or near.

The young man raised himself from the ground, and, approaching the cottage, knocked gently at the door. Receiving no answer, and having again fruitlessly knocked,

he ventured to lift the latch and enter. The cottage was empty, but a bright fire burned on the hearth, and on a table near it stood some coarse but substantial provisions.

Inconstant seated himself by the fire, and awaited the coming of the peasant, to whom he supposed the cottage to belong, until he was weary. Then at last, driven by the pangs of hunger, he helped himself to the provisions before him. "I can make over to the owner some portion of my clothing in payment," thought he, "or I can send him some remuneration hereafter."

But no owner appeared. The night fell, another day dawned, and still the cottage remained unvisited.

"If it were not for the fire and the food," reflected Inconstant, "I should have thought this the home of some one driven away by the approach of Captain Death."

The more Inconstant thought on his position, the less desire he felt to leave it. Whither, indeed, should he bend his steps? In no direction did he perceive any indication of human activity. No pathway led to the cottage, and on all sides extended an apparently boundless waste. Then, again, in what guise should he present himself again before the sight of his fellows? His influence and his position in Earthly-Delight were certainly lost for ever. Finally, if he left the spot where he found himself, might he not fall in with the fierce enemy who had already robbed him of his dearest possessions?

The wearied man decided to remain where he was, and for some time carried out his resolution.

In those days of solitude and of large opportunity for quiet and uninterrupted reflection, it might, perhaps, have been hoped that the exile's heart would have turned back to the home he had at the first deserted, to the love of that Father who had given him the fortune he had lost. But it was not so. The same tempests which wear away some friable rocks only serve to harden others, and the sorrows of the past seemed rather to harden than to soften the young man's mind. He looked back, not to Zion Towers, but to Earthly-Delight; he remembered, not that he had lost his Father's protection, but that Pulchella had been torn from him; he thought with intense regret of the folly which had marked much of his earlier career in the devastated city, but this feeling only awakened in him a desire to retrieve his fortunes in some other field, without submitting to the degradation of returning as a suppliant to his first home.

And solitude, however pleasant at first, soon becomes wearisome. Even the feeling of safety, which had so soothed the ruined man's stricken heart at first, after awhile gave way to an increasing feeling of restlessness. "Wanderer that I am," he cried out at last, almost vexed and disappointed with himself, "I must even try my fortune on the road again."

Leaving the cottage behind him, he struck off across the heath, keeping in a straight line, as nearly as he could judge by the direction of the sun, and by the undulations of the ground. For several hours nothing appeared to vary in any way the monotony of the journey, but just as

the day was drawing in, he came upon a track, from the track into a footpath, and from the footpath into a road.

Where the footpath joined the road stood a guide-post, with two hands pointing in opposite directions. On the one was written, "To Zion Towers;" on the other, "To Mansmerit."

Inconstant sat down by the roadside at the foot of the guide-post, took out from his pockets a morsel of bread which he had brought with him (the last left in the cottage), and, while slowly eating it, began to think.

His thoughts took many forms. How far was it to his home? and how far to that other city? What would Fairseeming say to him, and Mr. Presbyter, if he went back? Was not Mansmerit a good place for a pushing and industrious man, if he could only get there? And yet, and yet—would that busy place—of which he remembered something from his school experience—be at the best half so sweet as home? Thus thinking, he looked down the road Zionwards; and, as he looked, he saw with delight a traveller coming towards him. And surely his form and features were not unknown? Could it be his old servant Conscience, or did his eyes deceive him?

There was no deception in the matter. It was truly Conscience whom he perceived, and in a few moments the old servant was at his master's knees, kissing his hands in almost a paroxysm of welcome. But Inconstant would not suffer this. "Sit beside me, my old friend," he said, insisting that Conscience should rise from his suppliant

posture, "I ought to be asking forgiveness of thee, rather than thou of me."

So the two sat side by side—although, indeed, Conscience still kept himself at a somewhat respectful distance—and began to converse.

"Dear master," said Conscience, "I have lighted upon thee at the best possible moment. The news of thy great losses has already reached me, and no sooner did I hear of them, than I set forth at once to seek thee. 'For,' said I to myself, 'surely my poor master will need a humble friend, and who should serve him like old Conscience?'"

"I value thy kindness much, my old friend," replied the wanderer, with tears in his eyes, "and especially when I consider how shamefully handled thou hast been by my directions. I trust that no lasting injury has been done to thee."

"For the matter of that, master," replied the old servant, rather hesitatingly, "I cannot say that I am altogether the man I was. I find some difficulty now in moving about at any pace, and there are some ugly scars about me yet. I am also a little hard of hearing, by reason of the repeated blows on the head, with which thy servant Pride belaboured me. But let us talk of something else, dear master. It gives me no pleasure to remember these things."

Inconstant looked at him more earnestly, and now saw that his old friend was, undoubtedly, a good deal altered for the worse. His heart smote him as he looked ;

things I cannot but remember, and may well wish that we were both safely back again in the midst of them."

"Yes, dear Conscience," replied Inconstant, a little (but only a little) moved, "but look at the other side. Remember that my share of all these things is spent and gone; if I were to go back, I should be only a beggar at the door."

This was so evidently true, that Conscience himself was staggered. "Well, master," said he, "I have already said that I am not accustomed to prophesy about the future. Still, I have known thy Father these many years. And from that book which they read so much at Zion Towers, as well as from our own experience of Him, we know that He is too good and gracious ever to turn His child out of doors."

Unhappily, this was just what Inconstant could not tolerate. The mere mention of the Book of the Divine Will brought back all manner of miserable memories. Mr. Presbyter (whom he always secretly disliked), his own deliberate casting away of the very volume, Mr. Gospeller's allusions to it, and the heart-rending thought of Pulchella's loss, at once came crowding on his remembrance.

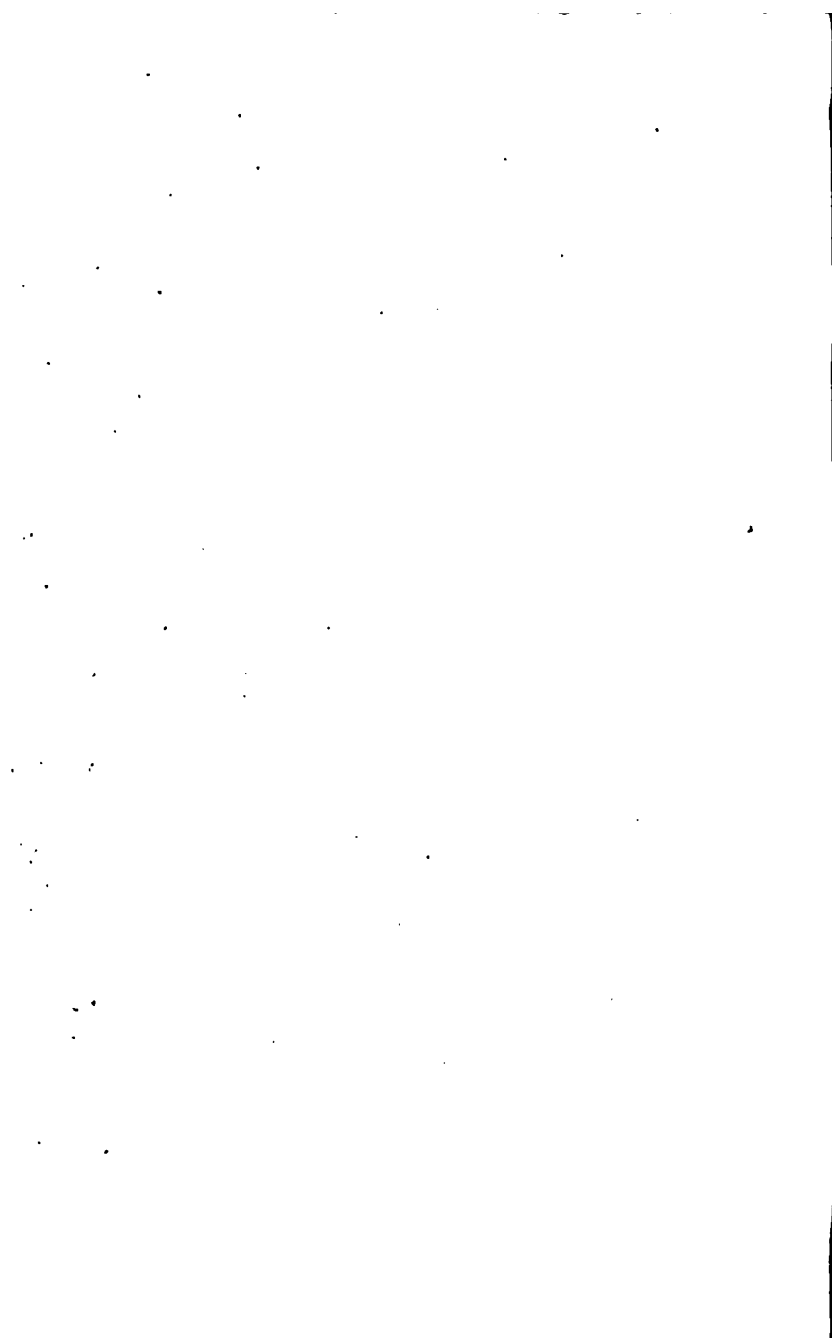
"Master Conscience," he cried, stung into actual and open resistance, "hold thy peace. Thy words have decided me to go forward and not back. I can never face that psalm-singing crowd again. If I have nothing left but my manhood, and my energy, at least I have these."

"And more than these," cried a voice behind him.

Inconstant looked round, and to his great surprise



MASTER PRIDE'S NEW COMPANIONS.



beheld a little company of respectably dressed travellers, in the front of whom stood Pride. He could not repress his astonishment.

"I thought we were alone," said he.

"Not so, dear Mr. Inconstant," replied Pride, who was now dressed in very excellent garments, wore a good deal of jewellery on his person, and altogether seemed in good case. "Thou hast only been too much engaged to notice our approach. But here we are, and although, dear sir, I will not be thy servant any longer, yet am I very ready to help thee, for thy many kindnesses in past time."

"I can hardly understand thy meaning, Pride, much less thank thee," said the young man, utterly at a loss to comprehend his new position.

"Well, we will explain all by and bye. This good company is on the road to Mansmerit. This gentleman's name is Mr. Sobriety, yonder stands Mr. Uprightness, and my comrade on the left is Mr. Industry. All excellent fellows, and all of us bound to make our fortunes in the good town of Mansmerit. Come, my old master, wilt thou go with us?" And Pride held out his hand.

Inconstant wavered but a moment, and then, taking the proffered hand, shook it heartily, and declared himself much obliged by Pride's generous offer. After which, he shook hands with the others of the party, and then remembered Conscience.

"I have an old servant hereabouts, friends. You will allow him to go with us, I trust?"

"Certainly," cried the four newcomers. "We know him well. He is an old friend of ours. By all means bring Mr. Conscience along."

But Conscience had disappeared.

CHAP. XIV.

INCONSTANT JOURNEYS TO THE TOWN OF MANSMERIT.

The town of Mansmerit is an old-established and thriving place, and increases year by year. Its situation naturally is much against it, for it lies on the hills to the north; and originally the country all around was bleak and bare, owing partly to a rocky soil, and partly to its elevated position. But of late years, through the industry and ingenuity of the inhabitants, all this has been much altered for the better. Belts of trees have been planted in various directions round the town, artificial soil has been abundantly brought from more favoured regions, the houses have been specially constructed to resist the cold and the wintry tempests, and fuel is abundant and cheap. On the whole, therefore, the town is a far pleasanter place to live in than you would expect to find in such a position, and its advantages in other respects are so great that its prosperity is easily accounted for.

Mansmerit, in short, is a town whose treasures lie below the surface. It depends, not upon the dew of heaven

from above, but upon the treasures of the depth beneath. It was in its first origin a purely mining town, and altogether of the earth, earthy. The stones of its buildings, the fuel of its furnaces, the metals which employ its multitudinous forges and manufactories, are all raised out of the bosom of the hills on which it stands. But, although of such a character originally, it has in these latter days expanded very far beyond its original limits. The cheapness of fuel and metal has attracted numberless trades to this busy place, and notably those trades in which the object is not so much to produce thoroughly durable articles, as those which are cheap and fairly serviceable, good enough for the use of the multitude. Cheap clothing, in every sort of stuff and of every possible colour and pattern, from the Quaker's drab to the actor's tinselled robe, is here manufactured in vast quantities. Rags of all sorts are worked up into most respectable-looking broadcloths. The imitation jewellery trade has its home here: whether you desire the flashing radiance of the diamond, the soft purity of the pearl, the genial warmth of the ruby, or the delicate and tender unaffectedness of the turquoise; here you can be fitted out for the smallest possible sum with imitations which will almost deceive the most practised eye. Arms of defence and offence, ornamental work of every kind, toys and knicknackeries, are likewise produced in large profusion in Mansmerit. In fact, few businesses are not to be found there—except, it may be, the manufacture of first-class furniture, and the various departments of the provision

trade. In these last, the town is peculiarly deficient; for its groceries, its animal and vegetable food, and even its water, it is dependent upon distant places, and thereby is not unfrequently put to the sorest straits. When any block occurs upon the surrounding roads, or any damage happens to the long canal by which its drinking water is brought from a distant lake, the town of Mansmerit speedily becomes conscious of its natural deficiencies.

"This is the place for me," cried Pride, as, towards the close of day, the company of pilgrims toiled up the last portion of the long hill by which the town is approached by travellers from the south. "And I am truly glad to be nearly there, for the journey has somewhat fatigued me."

"It seems dark and gloomy," remarked Inconstant. "I have some memory of the place, as it was when I was a boy, and at school with Dr. Prudence here. But then it was almost a country village, and now I confess that it looks terribly altered for the worse."

It cannot be concealed that there was some justice in this expression of the traveller's disappointment. At this particular moment, a heavy pall of smoke hung over the town, pierced with innumerable factory chimneys. Occasionally, but only occasionally, it lifted, and revealed long rows of dingy brick houses, and vast manufactories, entirely devoid of the slightest attempt at ornament. "Neither so fair as Zion Towers, nor so lively as Earthly-Delight," murmured Inconstant, almost to himself.

"Certainly, the first aspect of the town is not so agree-

able as that of many worse places," replied Mr. Industry; "but thou wilt get to like it more when thou knowest it better. Where there's smoke, remember, there's money."

Inconstant sighed and changed the subject. Perhaps he remembered that he had once possessed all that could be desired, without any accompanying disadvantages.

"Well, we shall see soon enough. And what are thy plans for us, good Mr. Pride?"

"My plans, sir, as far as we are concerned, and subject to thy consent, are that we shall still remain together. I have already explained that, when I managed to escape from Earthly-Delight, I took care to bring all I could with me. Now, I am quite willing to confess that I owe much of this to thy generosity."

Inconstant smiled rather sarcastically. He had never had the slightest doubt as to Pride's feathering his own nest at his master's expense. Nevertheless, it was evidently imprudent to say anything about this now, and the late master accordingly thanked his late servant very humbly for his kind intentions.

"Yes," continued Pride, with an unconcealed swagger, "thanks to common sense and a good look out before-hand, a friend of mine will not enter Mansmerit altogether empty-handed. Still, I have no mind for slaving behind a counter or at a desk, and shall be glad to have a younger partner."

So saying, he touched his pockets emphatically, and looked with a patronising air towards his late employer.

Inconstant could hardly restrain his disgust. When

he considered what this ill-bred fellow had been, and what he himself once was, his very heart sank within him. But Pride had at present so decidedly the better of him, that silence and consent were the only courses open. He bit his lips and said nothing.

Meanwhile, they had been rapidly nearing the town, and were now fairly within it. There were no fortifications as at Earthly-Delight, no sentinel or warder challenged their approach, and no stream had to be crossed before the city could be entered. The townsmen of Mansmerit, in fact, rather gloried in their absence of regular fortifications. "We are quite prepared to defend ourselves from mere robbery," said they, "and as for the attacks of the disciplined forces of regular governments, one regular government is much like another; so long as we have our wealth and our trade, we care little whom we serve."

Once within the town, it certainly looked more agreeable than from the outside. The streets were thronged with people, moving quietly and rapidly along; the shop-windows were well-supplied and well-lighted; and a general appearance of well-doing pervaded the place. Enormous boards, affixed to the front of each building, announced in gigantic letters the names and businesses of the occupants: and every few minutes you passed an immense manufactory, whose lights, glancing from a hundred windows, illuminated the whole neighbourhood, and the heavy throb of whose machinery shook the adjoining roadway with a ceaseless vibration.

Presently they came to a large open space, which Inconstant afterwards found was called Exchange Square, and here the party put up for the night, at the sign of The Whited Sepulchre. The travellers looked into the public room, but finding it crowded with guests, and being much fatigued, they thought it more prudent to have a private chamber, where they might have supper quietly to themselves, and so go unobserved to bed. "It will be more expensive," said Pride, "but when one starts in a place, it is as well to make a good beginning, and I will make myself paymaster for at least this one night. When there is a reason, Pride can spend his money as well as others."

While supper was preparing, they sat at the window of their room, which was on the first floor and looked on the public place, and conversed pleasantly. Industry had a great many tales to tell of the successful men of the town, and pointed out one or two of them, as they passed beneath. Mr. Uprightness, though rather dull as a sole companion, always proved a good listener, and Mr. Sobriety every now and then would let fall a remark which, though not erring on the side of novelty, showed considerable discrimination. Altogether the party had proved well suited to each other, and the half-hour before supper would have glided away satisfactorily enough, had it not been difficult for Inconstant altogether to banish from his mind the remembrance of his great calamities.

Just as the supper was coming in, Inconstant's attention was attracted by a personage in the street below. A

man just past the bloom of life, and yet of portly appearance and florid complexion, dressed in the soberest possible clothes, and walking with a demure look upon his countenance and his eyes cast down, came out of the rooms of a Young Man's Self-Elevation Society, immediately opposite the inn. Inconstant looked at him again and again, and thought he recognised both the countenance and the figure. He signed to Pride, and asked his opinion. "Had he not seen that face before?"

Pride looked at the personage again. "Something reminds me of Master Lust," he replied, "and yet there is a difference."

"I think so too," said Inconstant. "Yonder gentleman is uncommonly like Master Lust. But of course it cannot be he."

"Of course not," said Pride. And as, at this moment, the personage referred to turned down a street out of sight, and the supper also entered, the circumstance passed for the time out of Inconstant's mind. Soon afterwards, being exceedingly fatigued, all the travellers had retired to rest, and were sleeping profoundly in the comfortable bed-chambers of The Whited Sepulchre.

CHAP. XV.

INCONSTANT BECOMES A TRADESMAN OF MANSMERIT.

The discussion in the morning between the members of Inconstant's party was long and anxious. On the road none of them had seemed very willing to talk openly to one another, and the time had been taken up partly with general observations, partly with the accounts which Inconstant and Pride had to give of their escape from the city of Earthly-Delight. Master Pride had been at first a little loth to tell about his own, the truth being that he had escaped by being disguised as a corpse, and had been nearly smothered in the coffin which he had occupied in the transit. But his natural desire for notoriety and for hearing himself talk at length overcame his reluctance; and with a few additions and suppressions, he so related his story as to make himself out quite a hero.

As for Pride's three companions, they were not of the city of Earthly-Delight at all, but from the village of Good-Report, which lies half-way between Zion Towers and Mansmerit. Here Messrs. Sobriety, Industry, and

Uprightness had been for some time trying to make a living ; but the village is but small, and its trading opportunities are so limited, that, although an honest man may perchance contrive to earn enough to keep body and soul together, the prospect of obtaining any considerable fortune is altogether out of the question. Hence the three friends determined to leave for some more important and thriving place, and thus Master Pride picked them up on the road to Mansmerit, and, finding them very good company, had cast in his lot among them.

All this now came out, in the discussion at The Whited Sepulchre. It also then appeared that Inconstant was the poorest of the party. Indeed, had it not been for sundry jewels which he had prudently sewn up in his clothing, when the siege of Earthly-Delight began, and which he now remembered, he would have been utterly penniless. As it was, his stock was none of the largest, and he was compelled to feel that if his new companions would accept him as a partner in their undertakings, he would have the best of the bargain.

At first, it did not appear that they were much inclined to any such course. The three travellers from Good-Report were still ready enough to make common stock with each other in opening a house of business in their new dwelling-place, nor were they indisposed to take in Master Pride as their partner. This ancient varlet had now abundance of funds ; he was still active and apparently keen-sighted ; he seemed to combine the business

qualifications of long-headedness and hard-heartedness ; he had behaved well to them on the road ; and his manners were good and taking—a point in which they knew themselves to be somewhat lacking. But it was far otherwise with their younger friend, and Mr. Sobriety gave his opinion on that matter bluntly enough.

“I like not thy name, to say the least, Master Inconstant,” said he, “and I happen to know that friend Uprightness here entertains the same opinion as myself.”

“However,” remonstrated Industry, secretly more in favour of Inconstant than his two friends, “we might alter this. Master Inconstant may very well change his name, and his jewels and his labour are not to be altogether despised.”

“As you please, gentlemen,” replied Inconstant, unable to suppress a shade or two of vexation in his tone ; “I have no wish to thrust myself on any man’s society. Still, I take to you, gentlemen, and am willing to work awhile with you, on fair and equitable terms.”

“But about thy name ?” persisted Sobriety, “who will deal with a tradesman of thy name ?”

“I am not for changing my name,” replied Inconstant, “it has served me well hitherto, and shall serve me still.”

“And I like thy determination and straightforwardness much, my friend,” cried Uprightness, clapping him on the shoulder. “Nor does it seem to me that we are altogether right or impartial. Our friend Pride here has also an unsavoury name, yet have we all cause to know

how excellent a man he is? And why need we to put our names in the front at all? Let him amongst us that has the best-looking name for trade put his name forward, and let the rest of us be unnamed."

"Thy name is the best, friend Uprightness," remarked Pride.

"Be it so," replied the person addressed, "at the least I am not in any wise ashamed of it. It is all I have inherited from my good father, and there are but few members of my family. If it please you to use me for your purpose, I am quite content. UPRIGHTNESS AND COMPANY is perchance as good a title for business purposes as any other."

"Indeed I think it cannot well be mended," remarked Inconstant, smiling.

To this then it was agreed, and it being now fully determined that the party thus thrown together should commence trading in partnership, the question next arose in what trade should they engage? But here they were saved the trouble of much deliberation. Mr. Industry had already somewhat paved the way; and his two friends from Good-Report were neither without some inkling of his designs, nor unwilling to fall in with them. The business of Mr. Industry's late uncle, Councillor Hardwork, was now for sale, and might be had on easy terms. It was a trade which needed to be carried on by trustworthy persons, who could place confidence in one another; and, moreover, it was easy to learn and lucrative in its results.

In short, it was the business of Metallic Varnish Manufacturing—a trade common enough in the town of Mansmerit, and one of the most promising of its kind.

“My late uncle, the councillor,” explained Industry, “was one of those who first introduced this particular trade into this town. He had been brought up as a goldsmith and silversmith, but soon found that trade too laborious and expensive to be carried on by a person of small means. Having, therefore, learned the art of metallic-varnish-manufacturing in the town of Expediency (where he was apprenticed, and not far from Mansmerit) he gave up his earlier occupation, and established his later one. As my friends Sobriety and Uprightness already know to some extent, it is partly because I was aware that my uncle was in failing health that I determined to come hither; and since I set out I have both heard that Mr. Hardwork is deceased, and have received letters, inviting me to succeed him.”

Thus the question of trade was easily disposed of, and the town of Mansmerit was soon informed that Messrs. Uprightness and Company had undertaken the business of metallic-varnish-manufacturing, in the stead of the late Councillor Hardwork, deceased. “Their premises were vast and well appointed; the machinery and other resources at their disposal were of the utmost completeness and the newest possible character; every department of the business was confided to experienced and competent hands; the best artists were employed to design; and every sort of work

was undertaken, from the most extensive to the most trifling. The art of metallic-varnishing having hitherto been in its infancy, it had been reserved for Messrs. Uprightness and Company fully to develop its value. On reference to them, it would be found that the use of solid gold, silver, and other precious metals, might be regarded as practically extinct, the effect of metallic-varnishing being quite as good, at one millionth of the cost. Articles not originally varnished might now be so ingeniously covered, as to render their appearance incomparably more brilliant, and the thickness of the coating might be relied on as the stoutest possible, in proportion to the price paid. Old and worn-out articles could also be rendered equal (at least in appearance) to new; and many things in common use, which had not hitherto put on any appearance of beauty, might, at a trifling cost, be now rendered objects of art, as well as of utility. Under the new system, therefore, inaugurated by Messrs. Uprightness and Company, the town of Mansmerit and the world in general might be expected," &c., &c.

Thus far (and a good deal further also) the public advertisements of the new partners. Not long after their issue, Inconstant, so far as outward appearance went, might have seemed to a careless onlooker as though all his lifetime he had been a dweller in Mansmerit, and as if all his thoughts were occupied in improving to the best his position there. Early as the sun might rise, this earnest worker might be seen using its faint light for the purposes of his new occupation; and when the last radiance of evening

departed, the bright gleam of the lamp at his office windows showed that his labours were by no means closed with the daylight. Work, work, work—such now seemed the aim and only object of the new townsman of Mansmerit. How changed from the gay youth Inconstant, to whom the light labour of his Father's house seemed a burden too heavy to bear! "And yet," he murmured to himself, as he sometimes considered the change, "that was work for another—and work unpaid, either in honour or in money: whereas I labour now for myself, and work for something worth having." In which opinion, Inconstant was well supported by his partners. They regarded him, indeed, with extreme satisfaction, and praised much their own discernment in having chosen so excellent a comrade. "Did we not tell thee so!" cried Uprightness and Industry to their fellow-partner, Mr. Sobriety; "when thou wast unwilling to permit this good man to join us, did we not prophesy that he would do well? And now behold him—what tradesman more laborious, more saving, more thoughtful, more punctual than he?"

Mr. Sobriety was compelled to allow the truth of this. Still, though silenced, he was not altogether convinced. "When the tide turns, the stream runs up the river," he muttered. "We shall know better about Master Inconstant by-and-bye."

As for Mr. Pride, he was altogether jubilant, not only as to Inconstant, and the prospects of their business, but as to himself. "Thou art the man for my money," cried

he, looking in through the door into the room where Inconstant was engaged in an experiment, the object of which was to impart a peculiar and hitherto undiscovered tint to imitation bronzes ; " busy as usual, I see. Ah ! the only fault I have to find with thee is that thou hast no time for public duties. I am even now on my way to the Town Council Chamber, on a matter of much public importance, and I would willingly have had thy company."

Inconstant glanced at Pride, and saw that he was, indeed, gaily dressed, more than his wont, and even more swaggering in his air than before. " Not this day, good Pride," he replied hastily, " I cannot come with thee to-day. Now for myself, and by-and-bye for others." And so he turned him to his work again, while Pride went on his way.

So absorbing, indeed, was Inconstant's occupation in his new business that for some period after his arrival in the town, he could not even find time to visit his old schoolmaster, Dr. Prudence. Most persons find a delight in going back for awhile to the scenes of their childhood ; and though Inconstant had not left them in any very creditable manner, yet was he sensible of the ordinary yearning, and would have gratified it, but for his entire devotion to his new work. As it was, he permitted day after day to slip by without using it for this purpose, and not until many weeks after his arrival in Mansmerit, did he really set about re-visiting his former teacher.

When at length he found time to visit Dr. Prudence's academy, he found it considerably changed. The town

itself had so much enlarged that the old fields which had once surrounded the house were fields no longer, but streets and houses. Instead of the wild wanderings over the open country-side in which Dr. Prudence's earlier pupils indulged themselves, the present scholars had to be content with restricted games within a walled playground, and a system of formal gymnastics. Nor was this the only change for the worse. The school had fallen off a good deal in numbers, as well as appearance. A pretentious so-called college, standing just outside the town, and presided over by Dr. Speculation, had drawn off much of Dr. Prudence's connexion. Mr. Pharisee was also gone, and a very inferior personage, one Cant, had taken his place. "Mr. Pharisee had his good points, after all," thought the former pupil, gazing at his old teacher's successor, "but if ever there was a scoundrel, this Cant seems one." Mr. Sadducee was still in harness, but rather desponding. The sciences, to which (at least if his own word was to be taken) he was devoted, had not made that way in his world which he expected. How many times had he shown to demonstration that, given so much of certain materials and so much vital energy, and all results might be expected which ignorant persons now attributed to feeling, passion, Divine influence, and so on. Alas! how often had he shewn this; and then his pupils, as one by one they grew up, went back to the old delusions!

Dr. Prudence himself, though exceedingly courteous, was not by any means cordial. Inconstant had left him

but too lately, and under too painful circumstances, to permit anything else to be expected. His visitor, also, was ill at ease himself. He felt that the cool grey eye of the old schoolmaster read him just as easily as in former times; moreover, he was afraid that the Doctor might put unpleasant questions as to the reasons for his being in the town, and as to his relations with home. On the whole, therefore, he thought it as well to cut the interview short, and his old master was evidently nothing loth that he should do so. The old man was not apt to believe in rapid reforms—and it may be that he was right.

Inconstant sighed as he turned from the door, to walk back in the darkness to his solitary lodging. "He might have been a little more friendly," he murmured, "but there—these virtuous people are always the last to believe in a man's good intentions. I wonder how he would receive Fairseeming? And does my brother ever come to see him?"

What such reflections as these might have led to is now impossible to tell. They were interrupted by the whine of a beggar, imploring alms. Inconstant pushed along, pretending to be deaf. The general opinion of the town of Mansmerit is that all chance alms-giving is unbusinesslike, and Inconstant was beginning to imbibe this opinion himself.

But the beggar sent so piercing a cry after him that he stopped. "For the love of heaven, good sir! I am dying of hunger."

"Surely, I know that voice?" thought Inconstant, and turning back, he looked earnestly into the mendicant's countenance.

"It is, indeed, my old companion Indolence!" he cried in astonishment.

"Alas! my lord Inconstant, and is it thou?" cried the beggar, in return. "I fear me thou comest too late." Even as he spoke he staggered and would have fallen, but that his old companion caught him in his arms. "It is too true; I am dying of hunger and cold. I have gone from bad to worse, from much to little, and from little to none. And now, even in the midst of this rich town, I am truly dying of starvation."

"If report speaks true," said Inconstant, "thou hast deserved thy fate, Indolence. Yet would I not reproach thee at such a time as this. Rather will I help thee all I can." So saying, he gently laid the fainting form of his former friend on the ground, and commending him to the temporary care of some bystanders, went off at once to seek food and some means of conveyance. He felt that, though the man had so basely betrayed him, yet had he once regarded him as his friend.

But when Inconstant returned with what he sought, it was too late. Indolence had died the death he deserved, not even having had the time to confess his crimes, or to explain, further than has been already related, how he found his way from Earthly-Delight to Mansmerit. The officials of the latter town soon disposed of his remains.

However little they will give you when you are alive (unless you work for it), the good people of Mansmerit will, for their own sakes, bury you, when you are dead, with the utmost possible despatch and completeness.



CHAP. XVI.

AN OLD FRIEND COMES TO THE FRONT.

Not so long after the events just related, a most serious consultation took place in the counting-house of Messrs. Uprightness and Company. First appearances had been deceptive. The business of the late Councillor Hardwork was not found to be so profitable as it had been represented to be. Customers had been willing to deal largely with the new traders, but had not proved so willing to pay sufficiently for the work done. Some had even neglected to pay at all, and had in consequence inflicted very serious losses on the business.

"A gentleman whom I met yesterday," remarked Industry, "tells me that Surface, Glitter and Company, of Little Truth Street, have offered to do all the work we are now doing for him, at one half the price."

"It cannot be done," cried Uprightness; "the mere cost of the material, if the work is fairly done, would amount to more."

"That may be," continued Industry; "indeed, I told our customer the same. But he replied that at any rate

the work looked as well for a time, and sold twice as fast."

"And I have heard, also," interrupted Pride, "that so much knavery has been mixed up with the trade in which we are engaged, that the demand has fallen off in every direction for varnished goods, and now the cry is all for solid gold and silver, however plain."

"I have heard as much myself," sighed Inconstant, mournfully. He was in truth beginning to be very weary. Never in his life had he laboured as during his residence in Mansmerit, and never had he so determined to redeem his place and his possessions, at the price of the most determined exertions. The thoughts of the wealth and honour that had once been at his disposal, the remembrance of his short and delightful married life, the brightness and beauty of all to which he had beforetime been accustomed—all these contrasted sadly enough with the perpetual round of monotonous details, with the degrading anxieties after profit, and with the generally gloomy atmosphere of his present position. But, notwithstanding, the contrast had not depressed him at first so much as latterly. Hope of regaining wealth and honour, place and power, dignity and purity, had at first nerved him to the utmost exertions, and reconciled him to personal humiliation. But as the hope grew fainter, and the road of life, instead of leading upwards, became at first level, and now seemed likely to take a plunge downwards, it must be confessed that the man's heart—for, indeed, the youth's heart had long since passed from him—began to sicken with despair.

"I have heard as much myself," he said, mournfully. "But in truth I think it may be that such a business as ours is not large enough to support so many partners."

"Sayest thou so?" cried Pride, who of late had not done much in the business beyond spending the proceeds; "there I think thou art entirely wrong. For myself, I am well satisfied to go on, and hope for better times."

"But we are far from satisfied," cried Sobriety and Uprightness, almost at once. "And, indeed, we think that the sooner we are gone from this, the less will be our loss. If we cannot do better here, we can at least go back to Good-Report, and keep a decent roof over our heads, with what we had already saved before we came hither."

Pride boiled over at once. "I am ashamed of you, gentlemen," he cried, purple with rage. "It was you who led us into this; and now you turn upon us. Take your miserable little share with you at once, if you will. Mr. Industry, and my old master and I, can keep the ball rolling without you."

Inconstant had not thought so well of Master Pride for a long time as when he uttered this speech. In fact, he had latterly regarded his old attendant rather as a clog on the business than otherwise, but he now saw the advantage of a confident spirit and a bold front.

All this while Mr. Industry had said nothing. Indeed, he was generally rather a man of deeds than of words. But now he opened his mouth, and declared that, for his part, he was ready still to remain with Masters Pride and

Inconstant, even though Masters Sobriety and Uprightness should withdraw.

The latter gentlemen declared again that such was undoubtedly their intention, and, being particular friends, went off arm-in-arm together. Masters Pride and Industry also took their departure, although in different directions (for they were just as ill-assorted a pair as their partners were friendly), and Inconstant was left alone to his meditations.

The cool evening air was blowing through the open window against which his desk was placed, but the weary man was glad to push the casement still wider, and invite a fuller breeze to cool his aching brow. He leaned his forehead on his hands, propped his elbows on the desk, shut his eyes and tried to think about the future. As for the past—he dared not think of that. The words of the Archelder came back to him. “What was yesterday? Let us forget it. What was to-morrow? A Phantom.” Could these words be true? or were they only for the prosperous and happy? And where was the Archelder now? And where was—She whom, even in his thoughts, he could not name?

Just at this juncture, two persons crossed before the window, and a moment afterwards a gentle knock announced a visitor. “Some late customer,” thought Inconstant.

But no. The person who came in, although considerably altered and aged, and with his looks cast upon the ground, as if half-ashamed to be recognised, was easily recognisable. It was none other than his old friend, Lust.

Inconstant was probably the more startled of the two. The man who is injured is not seldom more anxious to avoid a meeting than the man who injures. Hence Lust was the first to speak.

"I cannot expect thee to receive me again, my dear lord"—he began, timidly advancing.

"Call me that no longer, Master Lust," interrupted Inconstant; "I am a poor struggling trader, and no lord now."

"Then, dear Inconstant—for I will still call thee dear—let me say again that I expected thy anger, and am come prepared for it. I know I have done thee grievous wrong. I have spent thy property, I acknowledge, and led thee into many ruinous courses."

"And stolen my money like a thief," added Inconstant, beginning to get over his surprise, and indignant at the fellow's impudence.

"Stolen — thief?" cried Lust, with well-feigned astonishment. "What means such an accusation as this?"

Inconstant was staggered. "Need I explain it, man?" he cried. "Did'st thou not—thou and Indolence together—run off with my property, in Earthly-Delight?"

"Never, my dear lord," exclaimed the scoundrel whom Inconstant was addressing, "never! Well aware am I—and I deeply repent—that I joined thee in ruinous courses in Earthly-Delight. But never have I acted the part of a thief towards thee, dear friend." And with that:

the villain sank into a chair, and, covering his face with his hands, pretended to weep.

"Can'st thou deny thy flight, Master Lust?" inquired Inconstant, slightly softened. "After all," thought he, "I may be mistaken."

"My flight? no, indeed," rejoined Lust; "and who would not fly for the same reasons as mine? What? Dost thou not know that I was well-nigh murdered by a company of foot-pads, headed by one Disease, and carried off by them into the very camp of Captain Death?"

"But was not Master Indolence with thee?" faltered Inconstant, taken aback.

"Indolence? Nay, I know not where he is," rejoined Lust, mournfully—the liar knew well that his late companion was dead and buried, and so could tell no tales—"ah! he and thou and I were good friends indeed! And is he with thee still, our poor friend Indolence?"

"He is dead," rejoined Inconstant curtly, and doing his best to look his visitor through. But Lust was no more capable of being looked through than a marble statue. His glances were still as open as the day, and not a quiver showed itself even in his eyelids, as he returned the look. Then he sighed, and clasped his hands gently. "Dead? Well, well; we must all die. Nevertheless, while we live, let us eat and drink and enjoy the life we have."

It is idle to relate, at any length, the crooked ways by which, for his own purposes, the traitor Lust won his way back to Inconstant's confidence. He explained everything,

he accounted for everything, he sympathised with everything, he wormed out everything, he promised his help and his most cordial affection. In his hands Inconstant became once more as the clay under the potter. But at last it became too late to continue the interview any longer, and Lust rose to go.

"I forgot to say," said he, "that I have thought it best to change my name, which is against me with some people. Here in Mansmerit they call me Ambition. It is only a change of name, dear Inconstant, as thou wilt find—my nature is the same as ever. Perchance, I used to aim too much at the grosser bodily delights, and now I may look a little higher. But I am not really changed."

"I think thy new name an improvement, friend Ambition," said Inconstant, giving his hand a parting grasp.

"And one word more before I depart," continued the visitor, in a lower tone. "I have a friend with me—a man who will pull thee out of the mire, and set thee on the road to fortune, if thou likest to use him. He has been waiting outside all this while."

"Has he, indeed? I am truly sorry to have detained him so long," said Inconstant.

"He will take neither hurt nor affront," rejoined Lust—or rather Ambition—"he is used to waiting; and he prefers to remain unnoticed. But I will bring him round to-morrow, and he shall go into thy affairs." So saying, Ambition pushed the door open, as if to go.

"Thou mayest at least make us known to each other to-day," said Inconstant.

"With all my heart, dear sir," rejoined Ambition, turning to the person who had been so long in waiting. "My friend's name is Inconstant, junior partner in the house of Messrs. Uprightness and Company; and this good gentleman, dear sir, is Mr. Whitelies, financial agent to many eminent tradesmen in this thriving town. You will shortly be excellent friends, I am well assured. I can see that you were made for one another."

CHAP. XVII.

INGONSTANT FALLS SICK AND FINDS ANOTHER OLD FRIEND.

It is hardly necessary to say that Master Lust, or Ambition—or whatever else he chose to call himself—had no other object in becoming reconciled to his former victim than his own aggrandizement. Since his arrival at the town of Mansmerit, he had been putting out to great profit the proceeds of his former robbery, and by the help of Mr. Whitelies had made an excellent thing of it. But this game could not be played much longer. Accordingly, he was now contemplating a withdrawal from the town, and a return to his native village of Worldly-Mindedness. There, consoled with the remembrance of his past successes, and in the society of his friend Lawyer Discontent, and a few other similarly minded acquaintances, he purposed to end his days in an honourable retirement.

He might possibly have put these intentions into practice even before this, had not the arrival of his old friend at Mansmerit somewhat altered his plans, and induced him to consider whether there might not still be

some grains on the old field, which might be gleaned and added to his own heap, before a final departure. That Inconstant, of himself, had but little to part with, he soon became well aware, but about Inconstant's partners he entertained a very different opinion. As to them, mine host of The Whited Sepulchre, who had his eyes well about him, and gauged with no small accuracy the purses and characters of his customers, gave Master Lust (a fast friend, and a constant visitor at his establishment) the most satisfactory accounts. Further events confirmed the landlord's statements, and Lust soon made up his mind to attempt a second plucking of his former victim. Hence the visit lately described.

This visit had been successful (in the visitor's estimation) in the fullest degree, nor could he have arrived at a more fortunate moment. The withdrawal of Messrs. Sobriety and Uprightness relieved the field of just those persons, of whom he felt some apprehensions. As to Industry, Pride, and Inconstant himself, Lust knew well that he could mould them to anything he pleased, and plunder them at his leisure. And since it appeared, moreover, that Uprightness was willing to leave his name in the business, although he withdrew his money and his personal assistance, everything seemed to smile upon the traitor's prospects.

Furthermore, Inconstant was now but too willing to trust himself once again to the machinations of his old friend, and his old friend's new companion. Mr. Lust,

under his new name of Ambition, had very soon a seat in the counting-house of the factory, and Mr. Whitelies was daily backwards and forwards. There was but little difficulty in persuading Inconstant that the practical part of the business might very well be left to Mr. Industry, and the workpeople; whereas his own higher faculties and superior education would be better used in devising large, if doubtful, schemes for the rapid accumulation of profit, and in pushing his trade by dint of loud-tongued and not very scrupulous advertisements. Mr. Pride had also a congenial place found for him: Mr. Whitelies adroitly observing that by pushing himself into notice as a public man, he might bring much business to his house, and Pride being nothing loth to fulfil so easy and attractive a duty.

Industry and Pride being thus disposed of, the next step in the conspiracy was to get Inconstant himself out of the way for a while, so as to afford an opportunity for gathering together all available property, and securing a safe disappearance with it. For this, Lust expected to have to wait his time. But the time was not long in coming. When opportunity is the only thing wanting to crime, a would-be criminal soon finds it. Indeed, Inconstant saved his betrayer the trouble of devising any plan for hastening his ruin, by falling seriously sick, and being compelled, for a considerable period, to absent himself from his business, leaving it in the hands of the deceivers who now represented him.

Changed, indeed, for the worse was now the condition of the younger son of Zion Towers. No longer the occupant of a luxurious chamber, looking out over the broad and beautiful pleasure-grounds of a Father's house ; no more the lord of the fair mansion of Sweet-Meadows, tended by the love of an affectionate wife, and surrounded with the services of a numerous and well-trained retinue ; but tossing half-delirious on a humble pallet in a hired apartment, almost dependent upon the chance kindness of unsympathising strangers, and, worse than this, with a couple of determined and ruthless ruffians gradually getting into their hands the last relics of his dissipated fortune.

And yet this, perchance, rather overstates his case. Although Inconstant had in many points fallen, and fallen among thieves, and although the great tide of the people of Mansmerit ebbed and flowed under his windows, as unconscious and careless of his existence as the ocean tide is of the shell which it grinds to powder on the beach, yet—just as at Earthly-Delight there was a Pulchella, and a Mr. Gospeller with his little following—so in this stony-hearted town were there some of a different stamp to the general mass of the inhabitants. Such a one was the good widow in whose house Inconstant had his humble lodging, Mistress Humankindness. A woman with a rough outside, and at times a sharp tongue, with a livelihood to scrape together out of various humble pursuits, but yet with a warm corner in her heart for a desolate and sad stranger, such as was Inconstant now. Little cause had she to thank her

fellow-creatures, and hard was her struggle with fate, and the world in the rough bustling town where she lived, but whenever she looked at the present occupant of her rooms, she thought of her own wild son, far away on the sea (or, perchance, lying dead within its bosom) and had to turn away to hide the tears in her eyes.

But when her lodger, from occasionally bewailing his infirm health, and refusing the food which her own kind skill had prepared for him, fell into a grievous sickness, and took altogether to his bed, all the tenderness in the heart of Mrs. Humankindness shewed itself. At once, on discovering that Inconstant was unable to rise, she set off to the factory and to the doctor. At the factory she found Mr. Pride standing at the door, enjoying the sunshine, and delighting the passers by with his brave apparel.

"Mr. Inconstant," said the widow, "is so sick, sir, that he will not be at his business to-day—nor, for what I can see, for many days. I think his partners should know of it, both for their own sakes, and his; for he is but a lone lad after all, sir."

Mr. Pride looked much dismayed. "I will come and see Mr. Inconstant at once," said he. "But I must let our manager know." So saying, he retreated along the passage, and opening the door of the counting-house, called to some one within.

Mistress Humankindness followed him and looking over his shoulder, saw Lust seated at a desk, with a vast volume of accounts before him.





"Here is bad news, Mr. Ambition," said Pride, "our Mr. Inconstant is taken seriously ill. I must be off to him directly."

"Seriously ill, my dear sir!" cried Lust, leaping off his stool, and turning round, "I trust not. Pray go to him at once. I shall not be happy until I hear thy account of him. I would go myself, but that I should do him more good by remaining here."

"Of course," replied Pride; "we cannot both be absent, and maybe I am the better one to see our friend under the circumstances." The truth is that Master Pride both had little taste for the accounts in which he perceived Lust to be engaged, and also fancied that he had some medical skill, which he was well pleased to have an opportunity of exercising.

"Be it so, Mr. Pride," rejoined Lust, endeavouring to look miserable at the news he had received; "and if Whitelies calls, shall I tell him that—"

"Hush, hush!" cried Pride, pointing over his shoulder. Lust looked in the direction indicated, and perceived the widow.

"I did not perceive, dear sir," said he, "that you were not alone." Hereupon he came up to Pride, and finished his sentence in a whisper, to which Pride answered "Yes, yes," rather impatiently.

"Now then, Mistress, I can go with thee to my friend," said Mr. Pride, turning to the widow, and so they both went out into the street. Just as they were departing, however, Lust came running after.

"Canst thou leave me thy keys?" said he. "I know not when thou mayest return, and if Whitelies calls—"

"Hush, hush," interrupted Pride, turning perceptibly paler, and giving up his keys at once to Lust, who carried them back into the factory.

"Who is that gentleman?" enquired Mistress Human-kindness.

"They call him Ambition, my good woman," replied Pride, "he is an old friend both of thy lodger's and mine, and is now our manager."

"Ambition? Alas! sir, I thought I knew his face," said the widow. "Was he not a shipping agent when he first came to this town?"

"Nay, I know not," replied Pride. "But he has not long been with us."

"Trust him not, good sir," cried the woman, earnestly, "trust him not. It was he who beguiled my dead lad to sea, with false tales of pleasure and fortune. Trust him not."

"Oh! fear not for me," rejoined Pride, in a dignified tone, "I have my eyes open as wide as most men, and he must be keener than a razor that can deceive such a one as I."

"Well, well, sir," said his companion, meekly, "if I have said too much, pardon me. And now we have come to my house, kindly step in and look to Mr. Inconstant, while I go forward and fetch Doctor Reform. For truly he will need both doctor and nurse before long, or else am I much mistaken."

With that she went forward, and Mr. Pride entered in to his late master and present partner. Inconstant lay stretched upon his bed, partly dressed, but too weak to rise. Beside him stood an untasted meal. The sick man's eyes were closed, his face was ashy pale, except where two bright red spots burned on either cheek, his lips were dry and cracked, and through his open mouth the breath went and came short and sharply. The sunshine came into the room, but the blind was partly drawn, so as to prevent it from falling on the patient's face. Seated at the little table was a rough and weatherbeaten man, evidently weighty with years, but still hale and strong. He sat with folded arms, and eyes fixed on the sick man.

"I had not expected to find anyone here," said Pride, somewhat taken aback.

"At thy service, sir," said the strange attendant, rising. "I am but an old servant of Master Inconstant, and, hearing that he was sick, have come in to tend him. My name is Conscience."

"Conscience?" cried Pride; "and art thou, indeed, Conscience? of course, I ought to have known thee. Thou art the man whom I and Vanity turned-out-of-doors yonder so unceremoniously. Well, we used thee rather roughly that night, and, I am sorry to think, unjustly. Times are changed with me now, as thou seest. For my part, I have given up service, and taken to trading on my own account—and not without some success."

"Sir," replied Conscience gravely, "I bear thee no

malice for having fulfilled my dear master's orders. For my part, I am his servant still. And see, he has been awakened by thy entrance."

In truth, it seemed as if the sick man was about to rouse himself. His eyes opened, resting at once upon Conscience, and he made an effort to rise. But his strength proved insufficient for the effort. He sank back exhausted, and closed his eyes again, not in any wise surprised at the presence of his old servant, and yet evidently aware of it. In fact, it almost appeared that he fancied himself once more in his old home, for his lips moved, and the visitors heard him murmur, "Surely it is not yet the hour to rise, good Conscience."

Just at this point, the doctor, Mr. Reform, came in, attended by the good woman of the house. Of the two visitors he took at first no notice, but advancing at once to his patient, felt his pulse, put his hand on his forehead, turned down the coverlid and examined his bosom, listened awhile to the beating of his heart, and then stood quietly gazing at him for a few moments, while the others remained in perfect silence. At length he turned to the assembled company.

"This sickness, gentlemen," said he, "is not a mortal one."

"We are glad to hear it, sir," said Pride. "The gentleman is dear to at least two of us."

"To all," put in Mrs. Humankindness. "A kinder gentleman never lived with me, and I wish him well."

"His sickness is the result of troubles of the mind as much as of the body," continued the doctor. "But his health has evidently broken up in times past, and he will need the utmost care. Has he any friends in this town?"

"None but ourselves, sir," replied Conscience, sighing. "My young master comes, indeed, of a noble family; but we are far, alas! very far from home, and I am the only one of his servants left to him."

"Come, come, my good man," interrupted Pride, rather ruffled. "Thou forgettest that I also have had friendly intimacy with him for long. Pardon my old friend," he continued, turning to Doctor Reform; "he is somewhat of too sad a way of thinking. I doubt not, good sir, but that with thy skilful assistance we shall soon pull my partner (for such this gentleman is) safely through his present troubles."

"What he needs is quiet, food, careful attendance, and a complete change," said the doctor, smiling at Pride's officiousness and warmth. "He must also be continually watched, and never left alone. Not long hence I will send him a tranquillizing mixture, and will see him again soon." And with this Doctor Reform took his departure.

"A kindly sort of a man, Mr. Conscience," said Pride, when he was gone. "Sees at once that he has to do with sensible people. And now about the looking after thy master. I and the widow here can take the day-time between us, if thou canst take the night. I doubt not they

can put thee up some sort of a couch near my partner, if thou art willing to be with him all through the darkness."

"I should like it well, with permission of Mistress Humankindness," answered the old servant.

The good widow, who was willing enough to enter into any arrangement, at once consented. "If Mr. Pride would spend as much as possible of his days with Inconstant, she would be most happy to help him, and who so fit to sit up with his old master at nights, as good Mr. Conscience?"

CHAP. XVIII.

GOOD RESOLUTIONS, AND WHAT CAME OF THEM.

Many weeks had to roll slowly by, before Inconstant was in any measure restored to health, even with the unremitting attention of his old friends Pride and Conscience, and his excellent new friends, Doctor Reform, and the kind widow with whom he lodged. But at last it seemed as if the tide had really turned: the strong and stalwart nature of the man, which had at first refused to yield to the disease, now made head against it, and triumphed. The tints of health came back to his cheek; his limbs no longer refused to fulfil their office; to talk, to think, and to read began to have a pleasure in them. Spring was now coming over the land—even across the smoke of Mansmerit, her fragrant breath might be perceived afar—and spring seemed to be also coming into the sick man's heart.

But health would not return without bringing most important and most embarrassing questions with it. What about his business? the miserable schemes in which Messrs.

Lust and Whitelies had involved him? his debts? his prospects? and still more—what about his relationships with home?

Home? But could he dare to think of a home? There had been times, indeed, of late, when he had been tempted to doubt even the existence of such a place, even the existence of his Father, even his own existence. In Earthly-Delight the citizens had always acknowledged that there was a Master of Zion Towers, even though they denied His authority. But in Mansmerit few people ever seemed even to have heard of His name; or, if they had, they had agreed to ignore it. And such surroundings could not but insensibly affect Inconstant. He also had become doubtful even as to the facts of the past; he had felt inclined oftentimes to think them the fragmentary fancies of a dream.

This doubtfulness now came upon him with a fuller force during the delirium of sickness. In the parched hours of his feverish nights horrible doubts overwhelmed him. Even the shadows thrown by the glimmering light upon the walls and ceiling of his chamber shaped themselves into fearful words and sentences of despair. At such moments the Wanderer felt himself to be but as the foam on the water, as the flower in the meadow, as the flash of light that passes between two poles of a battery—a momentary manifestation and no more. And the thought would perchance have driven him mad, but for one happy circumstance. Lifting himself on his elbow, and stealing a glance round the scanty

curtain by which his face was shaded, the sick man never failed to see his old friend and servant Conscience. Sometimes, it is true, the good old man was drowsy, and never altogether brisk. Still, there he was, and Inconstant felt reassured. Yes, let the worst come, he could still call Zion Towers his home.

And Conscience had also had no small share in other thoughts besides those just described. In the silent hours of the night, during which he had watched at his master's side, the old servant had not failed of an endeavour to use them for what he thought to be his master's welfare. Not that he dared to press questions as of old : this it was evident that the sick man could not bear. But as trickling water will wear away hard stones, so a word here and a thought there had not by any means failed of a result.

But now the time was evidently come for bolder action. The convalescent and his two nurses were sitting in the waning light of a mild evening, discussing the future more openly than ever before. Doctor Reform had just taken his final leave, with the expression of a laughing hope that it might be long before he met his patient again.

"And I sincerely hope that it may be so," said Pride, as he closed the door after him, and came back to a seat at the window, opposite his friend. "A good fellow is Reform, but not, perhaps, so clever as one thinks at first, and a little prosy."

"Still, my master, he has given thee good advice,"

said old Conscience, from his post behind Inconstant's chair.

"Thou meanest as to my going back to my work, dost thou not?" said the sick man.

Conscience replied in the affirmative.

"And what says he about that?" enquired Pride, who had, in fact, only just come in as the doctor was leaving.

"He says," replied Inconstant, rather hesitatingly, "that I must not think of employing myself in it as I have done hitherto, and that, indeed, he would strongly exhort me to choose some other trade. He tells me that it is evident how anxious and troubled my mind has been, and that unless I can have a quiet mind instead of a troubled one, I shall never be truly well again."

"Well, well," said Pride, "I cannot see the force of his reasoning. Since our present manager came and his invaluable helper, Whitelies, it is surprising how little trouble has fallen to my lot, beyond the drawing of my share of the profits."

"And hast thou considered the source of those profits?" enquired the patient.

"For the matter of that," returned Pride, "I have not thought it my business to tie our excellent manager's hands."

"Then let me tell thee, friend Pride," said Inconstant, with a sudden increase of energy, "that sooner than take such profits more I would die in the town-ditch."

"Thou surpriseest me much, Mr. Inconstant, with thy new-found virtue!" replied Pride, angrily, "and art thou aware that we are not alone?"

"Well aware, Mr. Pride," said Inconstant. "Indeed it is my good old servant's exhortation which has brought me to this mind. Thou knowest well that this Lust, or this Ambition (as he now calls himself), worked me the direst ill, when we were in a different position yonder; and thou knowest also that he will drag our names through the mire here, if we let him go on as he has begun."

"I know nothing of the sort," retorted Pride, sullenly.

"Then if thou art wilfully ignorant, I am not," continued Inconstant. "Nor will I permit myself to be again entangled. I may have to be poor, but I will be honest."

"As thou wilt," ejaculated Pride. "It is one thing to talk, and another thing to do. Dost thou intend, the instant I have nursed thee into health again, to leave me in the lurch. For, mark me," continued he, rising from his seat in a rage, "I have no mind for turning pauper again, whatever thou hast. And if thy folly leads thee that way, we part company at once." With which words he dashed out of the room, without so much as even bidding farewell.

"I fear it will never do to part with Mr. Pride," said Inconstant to Conscience, sadly, when the sound of the outer door closing assured him that Pride was really gone; "though he was once my servant, he is now far more master than I am."

"Dear master," said Conscience, "when thou art stronger thou wilt have no fear of being deserted by him."

"It may be so," said Inconstant, "but just now I feel as though to separate from him would be to give up hope altogether."

Conscience could only give a sigh for answer, but all that night he noticed that, though his master feigned to be asleep, he lay awake, tossing from side to side in sadness and anxiety.

In the morning, very early compared with the hour at which he had for some time past arisen, Inconstant rose and declared his intention of once more proceeding to his work.

"My mind is fully determined, Conscience," said he, while he prepared to go forth; "I have done with Mr. Lust for ever, even though it cost me the help and countenance of Mr. Pride."

Conscience fairly clapped his hands. "I wish thee joy, good master," cried he, "and certain am I that thou wilt never repent thy determination."

At this moment a heavy footstep sounded on the stairs, the door was violently opened, and Pride rushed in; his face as pale as snow, and his clothes disordered.

"They are gone, the villains! gone again!" he cried.

"Who are gone?" ejaculated Inconstant.

"Served us the same trick twice over!" almost screamed the visitor. "Fool that I have been to believe the liars!"

Inconstant began to perceive his drift. "Dost thou mean, Pride, that that scoundrel Lust has—?" and his voice choked, as he tried to finish the sentence.

"Gone, sir—disappeared, sir—carried off every article of value he could lay hands on, and every coin out of the till; drawn every farthing from the bank, and left us worse than beggars."

Inconstant hid his face, and groaned aloud.

For some short time no one uttered another word. At last Inconstant ventured to speak. "Can anything be done?" he asked faintly.

"Nothing that I know of," answered Pride, "except we go after the villains, and try to catch them, before they have spent our money."

Inconstant seized his staff at once, and made for the door.

"Thou art not fit to travel, master," cried Conscience, trying to stay him.

"Stay me not, good friend," said Inconstant, pushing him aside. "Vengeance is a sacred duty, and the thought of vengeance will help me on. Come, Mr. Pride, we will be going at once, and do our best to find and punish the scoundrels. Conscience can stay here, and keep the house warm till we return."

"A good arrangement," said Pride; "the worthy man is far too old and stiff to keep up with us, but he will do well to stay behind, in case any intelligence should come of the runaways."

"Which way are they said to have gone?" inquired Inconstant, as soon as they got into the street.

"They were last seen on the Gehenna road," answered Pride. "And I think it likely they went that way," continued he, "because Lust's own village of Worldlymindedness lies on that road."

"We can at least try it," answered Inconstant, to whom the disappearance of Lust seemed to give fresh life. Indeed Pride himself could hardly keep up with him, such was the vigour with which he now strode onward.

All that day they went forward, enquiring at every stage after the fugitives. The road is a well-frequented one, and many villages lie on it, such as Spendthrifton, Bettingall, Drunkard's Hole, and the like; with not a few considerable towns, such as Moneymore and Goldhaven. But at none of them could they find any trace of the persons they sought. At last, just as the sun was going down, they came to the summit of a slight declivity, and saw a long straight reach of road before them, with a village in the distance.

"We shall not get beyond yonder village to-night, friend Pride," said Inconstant. "And in truth I am already weary."

"It is the same with myself," answered Pride, "and I much fear me the rascals are not gone this way. Still, we cannot return to-night; therefore let us even rest ourselves here awhile, and then push onward to the village, and spend the night there."

With that they sat down by the roadside, and began to converse again upon the one subject which occupied their thoughts. And so deeply were they soon engaged, as not to perceive the approach of a showily-dressed, slim-built, and handsome-faced traveller, who turned into the road from a bye-lane a little above where they were seated, and, coming up, cheerily bade them greeting.



CHAP. XIX.

INCONSTANT TAKES THE HIGHWAY TO GEHENNA.

"A fine evening, my masters," said the traveller.

"It seems so," replied Inconstant. "Canst thou tell us how far it may be to yonder village, and what sort of accommodation may be found there?"

"With all my heart," answered the traveller, sitting down beside the wearied wayfarers; "yonder snug village goes by the name of Farewell Houses, and is but a short distance hence. Thou seest that it is just so far from the town of Mansmerit, on the great Gehenna highway, that he who has come thus far has well nigh bid farewell to any thoughts of returning, besides that the hill we are on shuts out the prospect in this direction."

"But we, at any rate, think of returning," observed Pride, "at least when we have accomplished our present business."

The traveller smiled a courteous but unbelieving smile. "And may I venture to ask what your business may be?" enquired he.

"It is no secret," replied Inconstant. "We are in pursuit of two runaways, named Lust and Whitelies, who but yesterday made off with all our property. Knowest thou ought of them, good sir?"

The traveller's only reply for a moment was a prolonged whistle. Then he broke into a low laugh. This, however, was too much for his companions, who leaped to their feet, and confronted him.

"Sir," cried Pride, angrily, "what mean'st thou by thus insulting us? We are weary, it is true, but not so weary as to be unable to teach thee better manners."

The unknown, however, though he restrained his laughter a little, sat perfectly unconcerned, and continued placidly smiling. Out of his bosom at the same time he drew the handle of a pistol, and pointed to it somewhat sarcastically.

"You will not take me unawares, my masters," said he, "and might even get the worst of an encounter. But I have no wish to quarrel with you. I laugh at your simplicity, gentlemen, and at the idea of my having met you here in this way. Masters Lust and Whitelies are both fast friends of mine, and are far enough from here. You will no more overtake them on this road than you will see an angel. But with your leave, gentlemen, I really must have my laugh out." And with that he burst out in their faces, all the while, however, keeping his eye on them, and having his fingers upon the handle of the pistol.

Inconstant and Pride stood opposite to him, petrified and speechless with helpless rage. At last Pride found words. "I think," said he to Inconstant, "this is no place for us. Let us leave this lively gentleman, and begone." So saying, he took his friend by the arm, and was for hurrying him off straightway. In fact, they had already got them a few paces down the hill, when the traveller again addressed them, and this time in a more moderate voice.

"Pray do not be affronted," he cried, "I know that I do wrong to treat you thus. Pray pardon me, and come and sit by me awhile, for I can give you valuable information and advice."

The two weary men could hardly resist the invitation, at any rate so far as regarded going back.

"Listen to me, my masters," said the traveller, still sitting, but now with a composed, though still smiling countenance, while Inconstant and Pride stood in front of him. "I know these runaway gentlemen well, and where they are at this moment."

"Then tell us at once, sir," cried Inconstant and Pride together.

"No, I cannot do that; that would be betraying friends," returned the traveller. "But I will tell you this. They are where you will never get at them, and your property is with them. Take my advice, gentlemen," continued he, in a soothing voice, "and let the matter drop. The least said will be the soonest mended. Not a

coin will you ever see more of. what Masters Lust and Whitelies have got. The fact is, they are much of the same profession as myself."

"Indeed," said Pride, haughtily; "and what may, that be?"

The unknown paused a moment before he replied. Then, looking up and down the road, and perceiving that they were still alone, he replied in measured tones, and looking them steadily in the face. "*A robber and a murderer,*" said he, calmly.

"It is a bad trade," said Inconstant, after a pause.

"At least an ungentlemanly one," said Pride.

"We will not dispute your words, gentlemen," said the unknown, "but I should laugh again, only that I like the looks of you and do not wish to displease you. Pray give me your attention for a moment." Hereupon, unbuttoning his coat, he produced a pocket-book, unrolled it, and displayed to the miserable pair before him countless rolls of valuable notes. Then out of his various pockets he produced in a similar way purses filled with gold and silver, and magnificent ornaments studded with costly jewels.

"At any rate, you will now see that it is not bad for me," said the traveller, as he returned the valuables to their hiding places.

"But look at the end of it," faltered Inconstant.

"So some people say. But, one thing with another, we immoral people die comfortably in our beds as often as the rest. How old art thou, Mr. Inconstant? Nay, be not

surprised. I know thy name and all about thee—and what has thy slave-labour in yonder town brought thee? Look at me; I am older and richer than thou, and never did a day's honest labour in my life."

Inconstant looked gloomily at the ground.

"The traveller says true, comrade," whispered Pride.

"Well, my masters," continued the unknown, jumping up briskly from his seat, "I must be gone. But a word before we part. Robbery is a better trade than some suppose; and by the way, I heard just before we met, that one Seeker, a pearl-merchant, will be found on this road presently, going up to Mansmerit, and thence, it may be, to Zion Towers. I understand that he will be a booty worth the catching, but just now I have other fish to catch. So good morrow, my masters." And with that he bowed low, and walked briskly off.

"Not so bad a fellow, after all," said Inconstant, looking after him rather anxiously. "By the way, what is his name?"

"I will run after him and ask," said Pride.

However, the stranger saved him the trouble, for he suddenly turned back, as if he had remembered something.

"One word more," said he; "you may want a friend hereafter. Now, if you should by any accident ever take to my line of life, you will always find one in me."

"We were just about to ask your name, good sir," said Pride, much more humbly than before. The sight of the valuables had perchance dazzled him.

"Names alter," said the stranger gaily. "However, I am always easily found by those who need me, under some name or other. In the City of King Abaddon, I go by the name of Sathanas."

"Sathanas?" murmured Inconstant. "I fancy I have heard the name before." But while he was trying to remember where and when, the bearer of the name was gone.

The two friends sat a long while, after he disappeared, before they spoke. In fact, they sat until the light had entirely faded, and deep darkness reigned around. Then at last Inconstant addressed his companion.

"Did not our visitor say, friend Pride, that one Seeker, a pearl merchant, might be coming this way to-night?"

"I think he did," replied Inconstant's companion, but almost inaudibly, and drawing closer to him.

"Why should we be so poor and he so rich, friend Pride?" continued Inconstant.

"Nay, I know not," answered Pride. "Nor do I see much chance of a change for us; at least if we are to believe our friend who has left us."

"Hast thou much in thy pockets, master Pride, after paying for our night's lodging, think you?" asked Inconstant.

"Indeed, no," said Pride, "I am well nigh bare already."

"We might beseech this pearl merchant to help us,"

whispered Inconstant. "And if he refused, we might . . ." Here he stopped, perchance expecting his companion to fill up the sentence.

But Master Pride said nothing.

"See, here comes a traveller: maybe it is he," whispered Inconstant again.

"Go thou forward," said Pride, "and I will keep watch here."

Inconstant drew his hat down over his eyes, and went forward. The man he went to meet was labouring stoutly up the hill with a heavy jewel-case fastened to his back. As well as the darkness permitted him to be seen, he appeared to be in the decline of years, and leaned heavily on a staff.

"Good sir," said Inconstant in a broken voice, and planting himself in the traveller's pathway, "I pray thee help me. I am poor and well-nigh destitute."

Mr. Seeker—for it was indeed he—stopped for a moment to look at the speaker, and then endeavoured to move on again. "Out of my way, man," he cried; "go and work. I never help beggars on the highway."

"Still, Mr. Seeker, help a stranger for once. Thou art rich, and so erewhile was I. Give me of what thou bearest, enough at least to afford me a fresh start in life;" and with this he tapped the jewel-case significantly.

"Then thou art not a beggar?" cried the traveller, stepping back. "Thou art but a soft-spoken robber. But thou hast mistaken me; thou miscreant. I do not travel

these lonely roads unarmed." So saying, he put his hand within his breast, and it may be would have drawn some weapon thereout. But Inconstant, now fearful for himself, rushed upon him, twisted the staff out of his grasp, and almost without being aware of what he was doing, dealt the old man a fierce blow on the head. He tottered and fell.

At this moment Pride, seeing the scuffle, ran up.

"Good heavens," he cried, "I trust thou hast not done the poor man any serious harm."

"I know not," said Inconstant. And with that they knelt down beside the traveller, one at each side, and endeavoured to ascertain the extent of his injuries. Alas! the old man was senseless. A stream of blood was beginning to trickle from beneath his grey hairs, his breath had ceased, and his heart no longer throbbed.

"He is dead," said Inconstant, "yet I did not mean to slay him."

"Anyhow, that is what thou hast done," said Pride. "And if we be not quick at the rest of our work, we shall be hanged as murderers. For I see lights coming down the road and there is no time to lose."

Inconstant ventured no reply; indeed he dared no longer even glance at the old man's prostrate form. Still, he made no objection to Master Pride's loosing the jewel-case from the body. "It matters little to the poor fellow whether we take it or not," said he—"and it matters much to us," he added to himself.

But there was little time for speech or thought of any kind, for the approaching lights drew nearer and nearer, and were now almost upon them. Before they came quite close, however, the two wretched men had disappeared. With the jewel-case carried between them, they were running, as fast as their extreme weariness would permit, down the bye-lane out of which Sathanas had come.



CHAP. XX.

PENITENCE CONVEYS INCONSTANT ACROSS THE BITTER STRAITS.

The village of Farewell Houses is not far from the sea-shore. Indeed, when the wind sets landward, in spring-time, the salt spray blights the more tender flowers in the village gardens, and in the still summer nights the sullen roll of the surf is distinctly audible from the village street.

Toward this sea-shore the bye-lane, into which Inconstant and Pride turned to flee, almost directly leads; and after some hours travelling along it, the fugitives found themselves on its verge. An icy and tempestuous wind broke upon them as they left the shelter of the hollow, in which the road ran, and came out upon the edge of the low cliffs which here form the coast line. Before them, all was dark, neither moon nor stars were visible, and but that they could hear the wailing and the moaning of the sea, tossing high beneath a stormy wind, they would not have known that they were close upon the shore.

Inconstant had never yet seen the sea, nor had he known anything of its nearness. "I knew not," said he to his companion, "that we were so near the sea."

"Nor I," returned Pride, "and it seems that we have come to it at an evil time. We want food, and warmth, and shelter, and not the roaring of an unquiet ocean, and the howling of a wind which chills me to the bone."

"And yet I know not where we can obtain that we need," said Inconstant. "In this desolate place we shall find neither house nor host; and even if we should," continued he, shuddering, "we dare not show ourselves."

"Come, come," cried Pride, "thou art too down-hearted. It is true we are just now in evil case, and I am well-nigh fit to drop with my share of old Seeker's burden. But if we can weather to-night, it may be we shall do better to-morrow."

"I doubt it," returned his companion, sorrowfully, "O that we had never seen the old man nor heard of his jewels."

But Pride, though miserably down-hearted himself, was bent on keeping up his comrade's spirits.

"Thou wilt sing another song presently, when we have turned them into money," said he. "And surely I see a light below us? But how can we find our way down to it?"

However, a little further onwards, they found a rugged pathway leading down the cliff; and, although, with much difficulty, and no small danger—especially encumbered as they were with Mr. Seeker's heavy jewel-case—they found themselves on the beach. Between the cliffs, which now seemed ready to fall and crush them, and the dark and thundering sea, rising up with regular pulsations into a

black wall, and then bursting into sheets of foam, there was but a narrow passage. But looking along this they saw a fire, and by the fire the figure of a man.

"There is no help for it," said Pride to his companion, "we must make friends with yonder man, or die here of cold and hunger." And so, without more ado, he made his way towards him, followed by Inconstant.

The man seemed nothing surprised at being accosted by the two fugitives. He was dressed as a seaman, in rough but serviceable garments. His features were hard, and the fitful gleams of the fire-light increased their hardness; yet was there a gleam of softness in his eyes, and about his lips.

"You come late, Masters Pride and Inconstant," said he.

Neither Inconstant nor Pride could restrain a start of surprise at such an address. "Late?" faltered Inconstant, "hast thou been expecting us, friend?"

"Truly, my masters," said the seaman. "My orders were, to wait here for two gentlemen of your names, at nightfall; and by the height of the water now, I reckon it within two hours of midnight. Still, the tide will serve our turn as yet."

"Thou speakest in riddles, man," exclaimed Pride, sharply. "Who art thou, and what is thy business here?"

"My name, master," answered the man, "is Penitence; and that, I take it, is as good a name as thine. I belong to the look-out station of Heavenly Succour, which

lies down the coast, a good few leagues away. And my business is the care of yonder boat, which lies at the end of this cable. Now thou knowest all I can tell thee, and I hope thou art satisfied." So saying, he touched with his foot a small anchor fixed in the shingle-beach beside him, and, looking seaward along the rope which was attached to it, the new-comers now saw the dim outline of a sea-going boat, tossing up and down just outside the surf.

"Yes, my masters," continued the man, following their glances, "there she lies—as tight a little craft as ever swum a rough sea—*The Good Providence* I call her. She has taken many a one over these waters in worse nights than this, I can promise you. But if you want to cross in her to-night, as I am told you do, you had best lose no time, for the tide is turning."

"I will not come with thee," exclaimed Pride, nettled at the man's familiarity; "whence knowest thou of our business?"

"Nay, I know not of any business but my own, comrade," said the seaman; "it was one Watchful who hired me to wait here about this hour for you two and another. More I neither know nor care. And if the third man should not come quickly, he will not cross with us to-night."

"Who is this Watchful? he helped me once before," asked Inconstant of Pride, in a tone of utter amazement.

"I never heard the name in my life," said Pride,

equally amazed. "And more than that, I am well nigh wearied to death, and have hardly strength even to stand, much less to trouble myself about persons I have never yet heard of."

By this time the water had perceptibly fallen. Perceiving this, the seaman drew up the boat to the shore, and leaping into it himself, now called to the others to follow.

For a few moments longer Pride still lingered, but Inconstant, seizing the jewel-case himself, embarked without hesitation, and encouraged his comrade to follow. "What can we do better, friend," he cried, "than fly from this disastrous land?"

"And whither?" faltered Pride in return, distrustful even in his utter weariness. But the roar of the sea drowned his words, and even had he been heard, the tossing of the boat would have made it impossible for his companion to reply. It was all Pride could now do to clamber into it, and when safely in, he lay for awhile almost insensible at the bottom.

"There was a third to come," said the seaman, "and as I live, here he is, just in the nick of time. Here, master," he cried, casting a rope out towards the shore, "lay hold of that, and it will help thee in."

A moment afterwards, the third passenger climbed in, half plunging, and half dragged, through the water. In another moment the boatman had skilfully pushed off, and the boat was some sail-lengths from the shore.

"Lay hold of the rudder, comrade, and keep her head

out, while I hoist the sail forwards," cried the seaman, Inconstant mechanically obeyed, and the boat flew seawards like a dolphin.

Penitence now took the sail-rope in his hand, and came aft to Inconstant. Pride was still lying in the bottom of the boat, his head pillowed on the jewel-case. The third passenger was in the bows, wrapped in a thick cloak and entirely invisible in the darkness.

"A rough sea!" said the seaman, sitting down beside Inconstant, as a great wave dashed over the gunwale, and deluged Pride. "Thy friend will be drowned if he lies there," he added.

"Is there any danger, thinkest thou?" enquired Inconstant, forgetting Pride and thinking only of his crime.

"The sea is the sea," said Penitence gruffly; "and a rough spot too is these Bitter Straits, as people call them. Lift up that friend of thine, I tell thee, or he'll never reach the other side alive."

Inconstant endeavoured to lift Pride into a sitting posture, but he groaned and fell back again. However, after several further efforts of the kind, he was propped against his friend's knees, and so kept a little out of the reach of the waves.

After this, they all sat in silence so long that it seemed to Inconstant a very age. Gradually the wind rose higher, and the waves grew rougher. But the little boat kept gallantly on, and the seaman proved more tender than he looked. He cast a thick cloak round Inconstant, and

thrust a piece of rough and sour biscuit into his mouth. The wretched man was glad enough to accept even these kindnesses. In truth, he felt as though he must have died, but for some such timely succour. Thoughts of intolerable agony racked his mind; hunger, weariness, cold, and the tossing of the sea had almost crushed the life out of his body, while terror of the ocean and fear of the land contended fiercely within his bosom. Who was this strange man called Penitence? Whither also was he carrying him? Might he not be an emissary of that Eternal Justice which was said to hear the cry of murdered men? Had that Watchful perchance seen him as he bent over the dead old man, and arranged this as a trap to bring him to punishment?

At last he could keep silence no longer. "Is it far to the further shore, good Mr. Penitence?" he asked.

"Some way yet," was the reply.

"And what may men call it?" continued Inconstant faintly.

"I never heard of it by any name in particular," said the seaman. "In my parts they just call it The Far Country."

"And thinkest thou we shall get there safely?" went on the passenger.

"Maybe yes, and maybe no, master. The sea is the sea, as I said just now. The best way for them that cross this sea is to keep their accounts pretty square, and put their souls in the hand of Him that made it."

Inconstant trembled and said no more. The boat flew on, and on, and on. Pride seemed to be asleep. The passenger in the bows had neither moved nor spoken since they started. The seaman said nothing except when addressed, but looked forward into the darkness as though he could see through it.

At last, after many weary hours, there came a twinkle, like a very distant star, low down on the horizon, every now and then hidden by the waves, and far away on the left.

"The Far Country," said the seaman, pointing to the light, which waxed and waned, and waned and waxed again. "Yonder is the flashing light on Cape Desolation, set there by the Master of Zion Towers. In half-an-hour, if the wind holds, we shall run ashore."

The wind held, and the boat went on. At last, just as the dawn was faintly streaking the east, the keel grated on the shingle of a beach, and the boat stopped in the midst of a chaos of surf, with a shock that almost overturned it.

"Jump out, and get to shore quickly, comrades," cried the seaman, "there is no time to lose." And with that he leaped into the water, carrying the end of a rope with him. The man in the bows stood up, as if waiting for Inconstant. But Pride made no movement, even when his companion endeavoured to awaken him. An awful suspicion crossed Inconstant's mind. He laid his hand on his partner's face (for it was still too dark to see with any certainty), and his touch at once told him that his fears were well founded. Master Pride was cold and dead, gone beyond the reach of either enemies or friends

It was nearly by a miracle that Inconstant was not dead himself a few minutes later. The surf rolled in upon the boat, lifting it up the beach, and, dropping it on some jagged rocks which lay close at hand, shivered it into a hundred pieces. Inconstant, notwithstanding, had time to grasp the jewel-case, and somehow to get to land. The third passenger was equally successful.

"Well, masters, I fear you have lost me my good old boat," cried the seaman, as the two passengers emerged from the water, and joined him on the beach.

"And my poor friend also," groaned Inconstant.

"As to thy comrade," returned the seaman, "he was gone before. He looked well-nigh dead when we got him in, and the Bitter Straits have finished him."

"Alas! I fear it was so," cried Inconstant, hardly satisfied to be saved without his friend, "but let us at least remain here awhile, and watch to see whether his body may not be washed to shore."

"It will but endanger our own lives to do so," answered Penitence. "If we stay here long, we shall soon be dead ourselves of cold and hunger; and I give you my word, we are fortunate not to have died already of drowning."

"Is there then really no chance for my poor old servant and friend?" persisted Inconstant, his teeth chattering as he spoke.

"None that I know of," said the seaman, solemnly. "Thou wilt see him no more, till the sea gives up her dead."

Be thankful thou art saved thyself, and now come, let us seek some shelter. There should be some cottages here about, or I am much out in my reckoning."

So saying, Penitence led the way along the beach, and Inconstant followed him in silence, picking his path as best he might. The third passenger, who had been as speechless throughout the whole conversation just related as he had been before, brought up the rear. Thus they proceeded, every now and then stumbling in the uncertain light, for some little distance. At length their leader, leaving the beach, struck inland and upwards along a narrow pathway, and, shortly afterwards, the gleam of a light from a window showed that they were once more in the neighbourhood of human habitations,

CHAP. XXI.

CONSCIENCE AND INCONSTANT HOLD AN IMPORTANT CONVERSATION.

The house, to which the shipwrecked party now approached, was little better than a cottage. But nothing could have been more grateful to Inconstant, wearied, famished and exhausted as he was, than the prospect of even the humblest shelter and the commonest fare.

"I thought I knew the spot," said the seaman, stopping as they came near the house, and turning to his two companions. "There is little to be got in this country anywhere or at any time, and glad am I that I have not to dwell here all my life. But of all the unlucky corners of it, I think we have hit on the most unlucky."

"And why?" asked Inconstant, ready to face almost anything for the sake of rest and refreshment, "it cannot be so bad as to refuse us shelter and food."

"Little knowest thou of these parts, comrade," replied the seaman. "Except for his own purposes, old Remorse, that dwells here, would as soon see us die as live."

"Still, we can die but once," replied Inconstant, "and he can do us little more harm than we should take by starving here."

"True," said the seaman; "yet I thought it well to give thee notice beforehand of what sort of welcome we may expect."

The justice of these remarks was soon evident. No sooner had Penitence knocked at the door than a loud barking of dogs was heard within, and the rough voice of some one vainly bidding them be silent. After a while, the door opened, and the figure of the owner of the voice displayed itself in the midst of a dozen baying hounds.

"Down, Terror; down, Despair; back with you, Venom and Black Ruin," cried the man, speaking to his dogs. "Who knocks here?" continued he, speaking this time to the visitors, hardly visible in the early dawn.

"Three shipwrecked men," said the seaman, advancing, "who need fire and food sadly."

"If that is what you want," retorted the man in a surly tone, "you have come to the wrong place for either. We have hard work here to get what we want for ourselves, without giving away to any set of vagabonds who may knock at our doors."

"Good Sir," cried Inconstant, putting in a word, "we shall die of cold and hunger."

"And what do I care, even if you do?" growled Remorse. "Be off with you." So saying, he drove the dogs back into the house, and shut the door in their faces.



IN THE FAR COUNTRY.

"He is even a worse curmudgeon than I took him for," said the seaman. "Well, my masters, we are at an evil pass, and must perforce wait until the day light may show some more kindly dwelling. How much longer can'st thou hold out, Master Inconstant."

"Nay, I know not," replied Inconstant, "I am even now almost at my last gasp."

Here the third passenger for the first time opened his mouth. Now Inconstant had for some time suspected that he must be none other than his old servant, Conscience, and the first sound of his voice told that the suspicion was correct. But though much surprised, the Wanderer's weakness was just now so great that he was unable to express his surprise.

"I suddenly bethink me," said Conscience, "that I am not entirely without provision. Here in my wallet I have a few cakes of the famous bitter Bread of Affliction, and a flask of fresh water from the spring of Mercy." With this he produced that whereof he spoke, and offered it to his companions, who gladly partook. Bitter as the food was in the mouth, it was sweet and wholesome in the digestion, and Inconstant could hardly have supposed that so great a change for the better could have befallen him within so short a time.

By the time the food was finished, it was daylight, and they now perceived with joy that other dwellings were not far off. They also saw that the country around was wild and poor, treeless and rocky. In front lay the Bitter

Straits, still in wild commotion, and black with clouds and tempests. Behind them a line of dark slate mountains, whose jagged and barren edges ran parallel with the coast, and behind which the sun was just rising, shut in the view.

The cottager to whom they next appealed proved kinder than he to whom they first applied. He listened to their story, found them a fire, by which they dried their wet garments, and placed at their command all the poor resources in his power. "As for food," said he, "alas! we have none. We are well nigh consumed with famine, and I was even now about to get me to some of my more fortunate neighbours, and endeavour to beg what will keep life in me for another day."

"The men of these parts, then," said Inconstant, sighing deeply, "have an evil time of it."

"They have little but what the sea brings them," replied the cottager, "except it may be a trifle of farm-work or swineherding for old Remorse, who lives just above, and lords it over all the people here."

"We have had a taste of him already," observed Inconstant, gloomily. He was thinking of the future. "Is there, then, no decent trade nor employment here, to which a man may betake himself with some hope of success?"

"I know of none," replied Despondency—for so the host was called. "When first I came hither, indeed, from the town of Enthusiasm, I had hoped for great

things ; but I soon found out my mistake. I came over because I had heard that this was a new country, where much might be done, and large fortunes gained ; but alas ! I have sunk lower and lower until I am as you see me."

"Certainly, thy appearance does not speak well for this country, comrade," said the seaman.

"Thou art right," answered the cottager. "In truth, there is nothing here but a barren strip of land for miles and miles along the sea. As to what lies beyond the mountains, I know not ; but I can hear of neither passes through them, nor country beyond them."

Inconstant groaned.

"The best thing to be done," continued the cottager, after a short pause, "is to go back by the way you came."

"That we cannot do as yet," remarked Penitence, "for our boat is beaten altogether to pieces."

"But perchance some other vessel may take us off," said Conscience, taking up the conversation, "and truly there is much need that we should return, not only for our own sakes, but for the sake of others." And with that he looked so earnestly at his master, that Inconstant at once perceived that the secret of the jewel merchant's murder was known to him.

"Thinkest thou so?" he gasped faintly, the blood at once leaving his face, the sweat breaking out on his skin, and his tongue almost refusing to form the words.

"Aye, truly," said the seaman, interrupting, "return

we must. And I, at least, must find my way back soon, however strong the water may be. So, as my limbs are now pretty much refreshed by this good man's warm fire, and by our comrade's food, I will even take a stretch of a mile or two along the shore, and see what can be done." So saying, he rose from his seat, and thanking his entertainer, prepared to leave.

Hereupon the whole company undertook to see him on his way, and forthwith left the hut for that purpose. Indeed Inconstant had already secretly determined that, once outside, he would take to his heels at the earliest opportunity. But he found this not so easy: Conscience stuck close to him as his shadow, and much of his old respectful manner was evidently gone. Despondency, also, seemed in no mind to leave his new guests, and, when Penitence had parted from them, he even proposed that they should accompany him on his begging errand.

"You will find," said he, as they walked along, "that there is nothing for it but begging, starving, wrecking, or taking service with old Remorse. Believe me," he continued, pointing to the various houses of the village, "yonder dwell as worthless a set of vagabonds as you could meet in a day's march anywhere. In the hut nearest us dwells one Atheist, with his partners Idolater and Sceptic. These live altogether by plundering shipwrecked crews, and not seldom do they even hang out false lights, and lure vessels on these dangerous shores, with the hope of a harbour. Beyond them, you may notice a low black cottage. There

dwells Master Reprobate and his wife Hypocrite. They used to call him Backslider, and I hear he went by yet another name, and had a good position before he came hither. Further on, dwells one Sensualist. He was”

“Good sir,” interrupted Conscience, “I should be glad if thou would’st go forward alone, and leave us awhile for converse on a private matter. We will come after thee presently.”

“Master,” continued Conscience, when Despondency, thus addressed, had taken his departure, “I have a word for thee, which I am bound to speak.”

Inconstant turned away and covered his eyes with his hand. “I know what thou art about to say, good Conscience,” said he, his voice almost choked. “I think of little else.”

“Master,” said Conscience quietly, and drawing nearer, “the pearl-merchant is not dead.”

“What sayest thou?” cried Inconstant, heaving a great sigh of relief, and turning again to his servant. But the news, coming so suddenly to one so weakened, was too exciting to be borne with impunity, and, even as he spoke, the man fell fainting to the ground.

Conscience knelt beside his master, and lifting his hands, chafed them tenderly. It was all he could do, but it was enough, and after a while, Inconstant revived. “It was but a sudden swoon,” said he, faintly; “so go thou on now with thy story.”

“I saw him struck down,” replied Conscience, “and

when I came up, I deemed him to be dead. But after some little time, I found that his heart still beat, and not long afterwards he recovered and went upon his way. It was well I followed thee. But did'st thou suppose that I would let thee travel forth again alone?"

"I did not at least suppose that thou would'st dog my footsteps like a spy," rejoined Inconstant, once more beginning to be angry.

"Good master," said Conscience, rising from his knees and drawing up to his full height, "I perceive that that thou art once more about to be displeased with me. But this will I no longer suffer. I have now served thee many years, almost from thy babyhood. I might have stayed at ease in Zion Towers, but when thy folly led thee forth, my foolish love for thee made me follow thee. In that palace of sensual delights, where thou did'st dwell so long, and where thy soul was nearly gone, I still kept by thee, and when thy menials drove me out, I called a powerful friend to thy rescue. When thou wast wandering on the barren moors of Irresolution, I did my best to invite thee homewards. I nursed thee into health again at Mansmerit. I now bring thee news which ought to fill thy heart with unspeakable joy; and after a momentary gratitude thou art preparing again to blame me. But I begin to tire of thy service, and except thou wilt now be content to be guided aright, I give thee respectful warning that I shall leave thee for ever."

During this lengthy speech, Inconstant's mind had

undergone many alternations. Vexation, regret, grief, gratitude to Conscience, sorrow for his own vast losses, hopelessness of the future, thankfulness for his present safety, had rapidly succeeded one another and departed. Yet had these many thoughts undoubtedly left him better than they found him. So each wave, succeeding the former wave upon the shore, itself melts into nonentity, yet lifts the whole tide upwards. And yet, when Conscience ceased, Inconstant knew not what to reply.

"Thou art silent, my master," continued the servant, "I take it, then, that we must part. If so, remember that, much as I love thee and desire to serve thee, we part for ever;" and, so saying, he turned as though to go.

"Stay, dear Conscience," cried Inconstant, rising to his knees, laying hold of his servant's garment, and finding words at last, "stay awhile. Thou art somewhat too hard on thy unworthy master. Thou knowest that I have been sorely tried."

"By thine own exceeding folly," returned the servant.

"True enough," faltered Inconstant, "and I begin to feel myself most vile and miserable. But thou knowest how hardly I have been tempted."

"Not by me," retorted Conscience, a little roughly. "And if thou wast tempted, thou had'st strength and youth and health, and far more blessings than thou hast had temptations. And did any one go far to seek temptations without soon finding them?"

"I begin to see it, dear Conscience," said Inconstant,

"I begin to see it. I am even a poor weak sinner, and, being so, I cannot part from my only friend, even though he says unkind things. What would'st thou have me do, Conscience?"

"Put away thy sin," said the servant, pointing to the jewel-case, on which, indeed, Inconstant's head had been propped during his swoon, and which now lay on the ground at his feet.

"I had even forgotten that I had this with me," replied the young man, quite humbly, "but even though I starve, I will certainly rid me of this, and get it back if possible, to its owner. Yet how?"

"We shall not have long to wait for the means," replied Conscience; "indeed, if I mistake not, here comes good Penitence with some good news."

This was but partly correct. In a few moments Penitence joined them, but not with such good news as was expected. He had found the shell of a boat, lying on the beach at some little distance, and he thought it possible, with some patching, to get it to float again in a tolerably quiet sea. "The owners, I fear," said the seaman, "have gone to the bottom in it before it came to shore. It seems to be called *The Restitution*, but the paint is well-nigh knocked off. And at the best it is only fit for one man—and he should be a good seaman—to trust himself therein."

This was not encouraging. However, it soon appeared that Penitence himself was willing to run the risk of crossing, when the sea should have gone down, and he

would do his best to send further assistance, and to fulfil any charge entrusted to him. "Did he know one Seeker? No. But he would gladly do his best to find him, and hand over to him Mr. Inconstant's message and package." So saying, he took the jewel-case (which Conscience, while he saw his master in the mood, had taken care to hand him), folded his arm round it, made his rough farewell, and departed.

"He seems little moved by either his own misfortunes or ours," said Inconstant to his companion, as they watched him sturdily plunging through the shingle, and surmounting the difficulties in the path along the shore.

"Not so," replied Conscience. "The truth is friend Penitence is well used to meetings and partings, and though he may show but little sorrow for us, he will do his best on our behalf. See, he is turning round yonder point, and we shall see him no more as yet."

Inconstant watched the seaman out of sight, and then turned wearily to his servant.

"And now," said he; "what are we to do, good Conscience? It seems to me that we are utterly destitute."

"Even so," rejoined the servant; "and the destitute must either work, or beg, or steal. Dear master, thou hast refused the last: thou must accept the first."

"And for whom can we work?" asked Inconstant.

"Indeed, I know not, except it be for Remorse himself," replied Conscience. "If he will not give, at least he may employ our labour. Come, let us once more betake ourselves to him."

This was, no doubt, even a harder humiliation than Inconstant had bargained for. But it was a question of life or death, and all that a man hath will he give for his life. So, making a virtue of necessity, they went again towards the cottage, where they had been at first refused admittance. Conscience led the way, and Inconstant followed.

"Thou art silent, dear master," said Conscience, turning round as they neared the cottage.

"If I must confess it, Conscience," returned Inconstant, gloomily, "I was meditating on my Father's house."

"Thou dost well," said the servant; "and mayest thou not hope to return thither?"

Inconstant was silent. Then after a pause he said, "We are in a Far Country, and the Bitter Straits are between us and it."

"But help, perchance, may come," said the servant. "Look yonder; Penitence is even now on his way." And he pointed out upon the sea.

Inconstant turned and gazed earnestly in the direction indicated. The sea was still tempestuous and dark, the sky above was black with clouds, while the horizon was all enshrouded in mist. But in the midst of the otherwise universal dark, they saw the gleam of a ragged sail, seeming scarcely larger than a sea-gull's wings. Carefully watching this, they perceived that it was Penitence in his little boat, struggling gallantly with a stormy sea and an adverse wind back to the look-out station of Heavenly Succour.

CHAP. XXII.

THE DEPTHS OF HUMILIATION.

Farmer Remorse did not prove himself altogether implacable to the solicitations of the two wearied men who now applied to him, not for charitable assistance, but for work. He grumbled at their appearance, no doubt. He thought Inconstant much too finely dressed a gentleman to promise well for hard labour, and Conscience a good deal too old. But these difficulties were soon arranged. Under the pressure of necessity, the former tradesman of Mansmerit was persuaded without much difficulty to barter his warm and decent clothing for a suit of rags and a good meal in the present, with the promise of employment in the future. As to Conscience, Inconstant having fully declared that no circumstances would induce him to part any more from his companion, Remorse gave way on this point. "And now," said their miserly employer, when his two new servants had despatched a coarse meal at his expense, "what about thy work? As for ordinary labour just now, there is nothing to be done—and from all appearance there will

be nothing, if these bad times go on. In short, the only work for thee now is the tending of my swine ; and the sooner to work, the better I shall be pleased." So saying, Remorse rose and, beckoning his new slaves to follow him, left the house.

Inconstant and his companion rose, and humbly followed their new master. But it was not possible entirely to suppress their feelings. "Tending swine !" murmured the former ; "I did not deem that I should come to this. But surely it will be only for a short time. Even if Penitence should not return, something better will doubtless fall out for us soon."

"None of that muttering," growled Remorse, overhearing the last words, "better men than thou have done worse jobs than this. Now thou hast had some of thy wages, thou art like the rest, I reckon ; thou desirest to be off thy bargain. But I intend thee to stick to it, I can promise thee."

Inconstant made no reply, but meekly followed his new employer in silence. The man was altogether heart-broken.

Meanwhile Remorse strode on, with rapid and determined steps, before his new servants. At last, after a considerable and wearisome walk, they reached a bleak table-land or down, enclosed with a rough wall, and dotted here and there with locust-trees. In all directions a large number of swine were feeding, and in the corner of the enclosed space was a hut of unhewn stones.

"Here are we arrived at last," cried the master, wiping the sweat from his brow ; here is your work, my men, and yonder is your lodging. Look you, I shall now hold you responsible for the safe keeping of these swine. As for food, I will send you as much in that way as these hard times will let me, and do not expect too much. And mark me well ; if any damage should come to my property through you, your skins shall smart for it." With these words, he turned his back upon them, and left them to their own reflections.

Inconstant and Conscience sat down on the ground, in the place where they had been left standing, and gazed upon their vile charge in a stupefaction of silent grief. For many hours they sat without a word. At last the servant ventured to speak. "My master," said he, "suffer not thyself to be altogether stricken with despair."

"I was not thinking of the future at all, my good friend," replied Inconstant. "I was thinking of the present and the past."

"Truly," said Conscience, sighing deeply, "this is different from what we have known in times past."

"Yes," rejoined Inconstant. Then, after a pause, he added, slowly, "my good old friend, I think I have been beside myself."

"Indeed, my master, I also think it must have been so. For I cannot but confess, that all this sorrow is of thine own making." Thus answered Conscience, sighing deeply as he spoke.

"Alas, yes!" continued Inconstant, "I see my folly now. When I listened to those pretended friends of mine, I was but a foolish youth; when I left my Father's house at the first, I was mad; when I entered the city of Earthly-Delight, as they falsely call it, I was still more mad; when I turned myself towards Mansmerit, instead of homewards, surely my senses were utterly gone from me. And when I suffered the villain Lust to tempt me again; when I robbed and slew, or thought I slew, I was but mad; and mad with the madness of iniquity and sin. Alas! alas! now that it is too late, I see it all, dear Conscience."

"And can we do nothing to better ourselves?" faltered Conscience, attempting to console his master.

"Nothing, except it be to suffer the consequences of my folly," he returned; and with that he relapsed into a stony silence, from which Conscience in vain endeavoured to arouse him.

Nor was this a merely temporary condition. Many days indeed thus passed away—spent in utter degradation, and alleviated only, if this were alleviation, by the absence of actual starvation. Remorse at first kept his promise pretty fairly. Every morning the two miserable swineherds received, by the man who brought the food of the swine, a coarse but sufficient supply. And therefore, much as they loathed their work, the last hard necessity of life retained them in it.

After a while, however, even this miserable consolation of a sufficiency of coarse food began to fail them.

The supply sent grew coarser and more scanty, and seemed likely to fail them altogether. Nor were they long in learning the reason of this. From their new friend Despondency, who had soon found them out, and who now paid them continual visits, they heard the worst of news. The threatened famine had come in all its horrors. Miserable as the swineherds' plight was, it was yet better than that of many others. The village was nearly depopulated; unburied corpses lay far and wide in the open fields and roads; neither by labour nor by begging could food be obtained—for there was none to give. At last, Despondency came and insisted upon joining them in their wretched employment, and sharing their scanty supply. But this they would not permit. Their miserable pittance had now been diminished so seriously as almost to render life impossible, and, at last, actual starvation was staring them in the face.

"There is but a step between us and death," said Conscience to Inconstant, as they sat together in the door of their hovel, gazing with gaunt eyes upon the half-famished herd of unclean beasts before them, and almost grudging them the husks they were consuming.

"I shall be glad when it is over," replied his companion, gloomily.

"Say not so," said a rough but kindly voice, "speak not in thy haste, for thou knowest not what thou sayest."

Inconstant turned, and beheld with some surprise—and yet not much, for his troubles had somewhat dulled

his senses—two personages, one of whom he recognised as Mr. Gospeller, and the other as the young man named Watchful.

“Remember, thou who art so ready to speak,” continued Mr. Gospeller, “that it is not only appointed to all men once to die, but after death is the judgment.”

“I spoke foolishly,” replied Inconstant, submissively.

“But whence art thou, Mr. Gospeller?”

“From Zion Towers,” replied the preacher.

“Ah! how many hired servants there have bread enough and to spare!” sighed Inconstant, a little roused by the familiar name, “and here we perish with hunger.”

“True,” interrupted Watchful; “yet we come to bring thee help from thence, and to beseech thee to return.”

“Help? from Zion Towers? Beseechings to return?” faltered Inconstant, beginning to take more interest in the communications of the new-comers. “Can it be that they of Zion Towers have any thought of me still?”

“Have they ever forgotten thee, thou shouldest ask,” replied the disguised angel.

“All the day long have I stretched out my hands to a disobedient people. So says the Divine Book,” added Gospeller. “And again: Return unto me, and I will return unto you.”

“No,” said Inconstant, yet hesitating as he spoke, “return must be impossible for me. I have squandered all that my Father gave me; I have disgraced Him for ever; the only reparation I can now offer is to accept my punishment with resignation.”

"It should be so," returned the preacher. "But thy Father's thoughts are not as thy thoughts, nor His ways as thy ways. He has taken the consequences on Himself, He has provided a full ransom for all thy sins, and now He waits for thee to accept it at His hands."

"It cannot be," said Inconstant, still incredulous, and yet a little hopeful. "What assurance have I that my Father has done this for me?"

"The assurance of the Book of the Divine Will," replied Gospeller. "Thy case has been there provided for. I know well that thou hast in time past held that holy book in small esteem; but wilt thou not hear me now, if I declare thy Father's love to thee out of a copy of it, which thou wilt at once remember, and which surely thou shouldest highly prize?"

With these words, Mr. Gospeller unfolded a small packet which he carried with him; and disclosed a well-worn little book. Inconstant instantly recognised it, and his eyes filled with tears. It was the same which he had last seen in the hands of Pulchella.

"I know that volume but too well," said he, in broken accents.

"It has come back to me," said Mr. Gospeller, "from one to whom I lent it, and to whom it brought, by the Divine blessing, a sure and eternal peace. Now let me read for thee some of its gracious promises."

Inconstant said nothing; indeed his heart was too full to permit of speech. But he motioned the preacher to

sit down, and himself sat down beside him, while Conscience and the angel stood behind.

Thus encouraged, Mr. Gospeller read. He read the Story of the Cross; he read the offer of complete forgiveness through simple faith in the Great Redeemer as the One Sacrifice for sin; he read the promises of life eternal, and the foreshadowings of joys to come.

As he read, the actual scene before his hearer's eyes dissolved away. Instead of the unclean herd of swine, and the bleak wilderness around him, he saw again the stately mansion of his Father's home, thronged with happy inhabitants, and radiant with the sunshine of an everlasting tranquillity. The voice of the reader itself was changed. The repentant prodigal seemed to listen once more to his Father's voice, and to receive from Him the assurance of forgiveness. He saw how vile he was—and not only so, for that he had known before—but now he also saw that the Father's love was greater even than such crimes as his, and his mercy wider-stretching even than his own black ingratitude. And thus it came to pass that, when Mr. Gospeller ceased to read, his penitent hearer had applied the lessons of the reading practically to himself.

"I will arise, and go to my Father," said he, "and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son: make me as one of Thy hired servants."

A solemn silence for awhile succeeded these words. Then the angel laid gentle hold on Inconstant's hand.

"Thou art not so far as thou deemest from the kingdom of thy Father. Behold!" As he spoke, he pointed to the hills near the foot of which they stood. Looking thitherward, Inconstant now saw, what he never saw before, that a pathway climbed the mountain almost from the spot at which they were, and, passing with an upward spring across the very summit, provided an escape from The Far Country into the lands which lay beyond.

"Dost thou wonder at my words?" continued the angel. "But thou knewest not that these mountains are the very mountains of Grace, and that, on the slopes of the further side, stand Zion Towers. The Far Country is very near thy home for such as seek to find it; and though this side of the hills is bleak and desolate, the side which is all beauty and fertility is not far away."

In a few moments more, the little party were climbing the mountain, Watchful first, Mr. Gospeller and Inconstant side by side, and Conscience bringing up the rear.

CHAP. XXIII.

INCONSTANT CLIMBS THE MOUNTAINS OF GRACE.

The travellers had not gone many steps up the hill, before they came upon a cottage, hid away in a crevice of the rocks. Close to the side of the cottage, a tiny spring of clear water leaped out of the hills into a natural basin, and in front of the cottage a table was set with refreshments of various kinds.

"We shall stay here awhile for food," said the angel, "and here also we shall obtain a guide across the mountain."

"I did not think there was a dwelling so near," exclaimed Inconstant, altogether surprised, "nor that food was to be found anywhere in this famine-stricken country."

"That was because thine eyes were not yet opened," replied Mr. Gospeller, smiling; "but this cottage is kept by a good old servant of Zion Towers, and is replenished thence continually. Thy Father is one of those who know how to prepare a table even in the wilderness."

"Come, be seated," interrupted Watchful, "for we

have no time to lose. And here comes our host, good Mr. Samaritan, anxious to invite us himself to partake of what has been provided."

Inconstant turned and beheld a kindly-featured, hale and simply-dressed old man coming from the cottage towards them. With gentle and unobtrusive courtesy he pressed his guests to refresh themselves, and, while they were thus engaged, conversed pleasantly and profitably with them. But Inconstant could only listen. He felt that silence was the only course for one who had sinned so deeply, and been brought so low.

At length the repast was concluded, and Mr. Gospeller, rising to depart, thanked Mr. Samaritan cordially for his good company as well as his good cheer. "As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the countenance of his friend. So says the Book. And whenever I meet thee, good Master Samaritan, I understand that saying, and depart the better for our meeting."

"As for the pleasures of our meeting," answered old Samaritan, "I have as much reason to be thankful to thee as thou to me. Be careful to entertain strangers, says that same Book, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Here he glanced smilingly at Watchful. "And for the cheer, that is none of mine. It belongs to our common Master."

"True," said the preacher; "yet at least let us rejoice that we have met once more in the work of bringing back our common Master's son. The word of Gospeller and the

deed of Samaritan go well together. And now for our guide. Is he ready for us, thinkest thou?"

"I will enquire," replied Samaritan, and with that he partly opened the cottage door, and called to some one within. "Faith, my child," he cried, "come hither at once, for the travellers are ready."

"I am here, good father," said a child-like voice from within, and, in a moment afterwards, a bright-looking blue-eyed boy came forth, carrying a pilgrim's staff and a lighted lantern.

"Truly this is but a young guide," whispered Inconstant to Conscience, while he looked doubtfully at the child.

"Thou wilt find him a sure one," replied Samaritan, overhearing the words. "This is not his first essay across these mountains, and he knows every turn of the roads. But that is not his best claim to be thy guide. His best claim is that he holds our Master's commission. Show it, my child," continued the old man, turning to his young companion.

The boy drew a parchment from his bosom, and opened it. It was indeed a full commission from the Master of Zion Towers, duly signed and sealed, in favour of Faith as a guide Zionwards, and, for the better encouragement of those who should read it, these words were emblazoned at the foot:—"Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

"That is from the Divine Book," said Mr. Gospeller; "and so lead on, my young friend, without more ado."

The child smiled, folded his parchment, carefully replaced it in his bosom, and ran forwards a little way up the pass. The party of travellers then bade farewell to Mr. Samaritan, and prepared to follow. But here Inconstant, revived by the food and rest, again ventured to put in a word.

"Mr. Samaritan," said he, timidly advancing, "I am encouraged by thy kindness to ask another favour at thy hands."

"Speak without fear, my master," said Samaritan, kindly.

"It is with respect to my present garments that I wish to speak," continued Inconstant, looking down upon himself, and surveying his miserable appearance with undisguised aversion. "I am not clad as I should be in going back, even as a beggar, to my Father's house. These rags hardly cover my limbs, and my shoes are well-nigh falling from my feet. Have pity on me, then. Give or lend me some clothing in which I may be fitted to return, and be assured that I shall never forget thy kindness."

Mr. Samaritan hesitated a little, and evidently knew not what to reply. But, seeing this hesitation, Mr. Gospeller at once took upon himself to answer the petition.

"It cannot be," he said bluntly. "Not even Mr. Samaritan has clothing to spare. He may refresh us by the way, and help us forward, and pour oil and wine into our wounds; but to give to pilgrims garments which may fit them for thy Father's house, is not permitted to him."

"But how can I endure to appear as I am?" enquired Inconstant.

"As to that," returned the preacher, "thou mayest set thy mind at ease. It is His child, and not the garments of His child, that my Master yearns for. He will soon remedy all these thy deficiencies. What says the Book? I counsel thee to buy of Me white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed. For all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. So let us be going, even as we are."

Inconstant said no more. Wrapping his rags around him in the chilly air, and with sad eyes fixed on the ground, he turned and followed where Faith was already leading.

The road up the mountain was not an easy one. It was steep, so that the strength of the weak climber was soon exhausted; and had not Mr. Gospeller lent a helping hand and also encouraged him by many promises out of the Book he was so apt at quoting, it seemed doubtful whether Inconstant would ever reach the summit. The road was also uneven, rugged both with pointed stones, which entered into his ill-protected feet and tore them sadly, and with rolling boulders, on which if one stepped, they would immediately give way, and slip beneath the tread. Furthermore, the path was here and there soft with thick clay, which claved to the feet and would have hindered progress altogether, but that in such places the angel Watchful lifted the fainting man out of the mire, and set him on the firm rock. Lastly, deep pitfalls beset the path,

and many were the times when Inconstant might have fallen therein, but for the lantern which Faith carried, so holding it as ever to show, not only where the right path was to be found, but where such hidden dangers were to be avoided. Thus, notwithstanding their difficulties, the travellers steadily pushed their way upwards. Little by little the desolate plains of the Far Country sank beneath, and the waters of the Bitter Straits receded into the distance, until, as the evening drew on, and the shadows of the mountain fell around them, these objects became at last entirely invisible.

"I do not wonder," murmured Inconstant, as they neared the summit in the growing darkness, "that so few from these plains find their way back to Zion Towers. Hadst not thou been with me, good Mr. Gospeller, and had not these thy friends led the way and cared for me, surely, though I had attempted the passage, I had never reached even so far as this."

"Why debate such questions as these, friend?" responded the preacher, with a touch of anger in his tones. "Be satisfied that mercy and grace have found thee out, and question not as to what might have been, or might not have been. And truly, thou hadst better keep thy breath awhile for better purposes than mere discussion; for, unless I mistake, we have just now come to the greatest difficulty of all."

Inconstant looked forward, as well as he could in the darkness, and saw indeed that the pathway at this point

abruptly ended, coming to the face of an almost perpendicular wall of rock, whose top was lost in the surrounding gloom. He also perceived that both Watchful and the little guide, who had hitherto preceded him, had now disappeared.

For one single moment the young man feared either that he was dreaming, or that he had been entrapped, not indeed for purposes of robbery—for he had nothing to lose—but with a view to his destruction. However, such a feeling was but momentary, and although the two leaders had disappeared, yet both Gospeller and Conscience were close at his side. And the voice of the former of these at once reassured him.

"This," said Mr. Gospeller, "is the difficulty for which I counselled thee to reserve thy strength. This spot is known as The Last Step. Once above it, we are on the platform of the summit, and shall see the lights of Zion Towers beneath us, while all the road thence is pleasant and easy."

"That may be," returned Inconstant, sadly, "but if The Last Step be impossible for me to climb, how shall I ever see that blessed light, or tread that pleasant road?"

"To my mind, master," interrupted old Conscience, "it seems as though we had best lie down here and die. To climb this way is altogether beyond me."

"With men it is impossible," said Mr. Gospeller, "but with God all things are possible. And see, the way is already beginning to be made plain for us."

As he uttered these words, a light shewed itself on the summit of the rocky wall, and, looking up, Inconstant perceived that it proceeded from the lantern of Faith. By what means the child had himself gained the summit, there was no time to inquire, for in another moment the youthful guide began to let down towards the travellers a slender cord, the lower end of which just reached the ground beneath them.

"Thou must attach thyself to this at once," said Mr. Gospeller, "and Faith will draw thee up."

"It seems but slender," replied Inconstant, hesitating a little.

"Without doubt," said the preacher. "But notice that it is threefold, of gold, scarlet and blue. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

"But can Faith indeed draw up such a burden as I must be?" enquired Inconstant, still having his doubts.

"And dost thou doubt still?" replied Mr. Gospeller, solemnly and somewhat sternly, "thinkest thou that Watchful and I have been sent out from Zion Towers after thee on a fool's errand. This is the way back, and this is the only way. Every one who has come up from the Far Country before thee has come by this road, and, much as thou mayest doubt it, little Faith has pulled up every one of them. And let me urge thee to hasten, or I shall have to ascend by myself, and leave thee to take thy chance in thine own way."

At this moment, the cord shook, as if the person who

held it above was impatient. Casting his glance upwards, Inconstant saw that the young guide was now lying on the summit, but with his face, shoulders and arms projecting over the edge. His lantern and staff were set beside him, and in his hands he held the rope, which he had just vibrated as a sign to those below to hasten. And even as Inconstant looked, either Mr. Gospeller from behind, or the angel from above (for Inconstant never knew which), uttered a last encouragement. "I have brought thee up out of the horrible pit, and set thy feet upon a rock, and established thy goings."

The returning prodigal hesitated no longer. He shut his eyes and clasped the rope. In a moment it was drawn upwards, not indeed by little Faith, as he imagined, but by the angel who stood behind him, invisible from below.

When he opened his eyes again, Inconstant stood on the summit of the mountain, and not only he, but Conscience and Mr. Gospeller also.

The summit of the mountain was not dark, as the path below had been, underneath the shadows of the rock, but was lighted up by several torches, kindled from the lantern of Faith, and most of all by a strange and unearthly radiance. Looking for its source, Inconstant perceived that the light poured from a golden cross, standing in the midst of the circular platform on which he now found himself.

He also perceived that the end of the rope by which he had been so safely drawn up was made fast to the foot of the same cross, having been clasped round it with that

strong and never-failing knot wherewith the Bundle of Life is bound.

"Thou mayest perchance wonder at these things," said Mr Gospeller, watching him as he looked round. "But some while since, thou didst ask me what assurance I could give that I came to thee from Zion Towers. I now point thee for an answer to yonder golden Cross, from which the Divine Glory is continually streaming, as thou beholdest it streaming now. This Cross reminds us how pardon has been purchased for believing sinners; this light assures us that its power is unexhausted still. Furthermore, the ground whereon we stand is holy ground. For this, I should tell thee, is that very Hill Calvary, the summit of the mountains of Grace, of which thou hast so often been told, and where thy Redeemer shed His precious blood. Furthermore, standing here, and looking onwards in the line of the Cross, thou mayest see thy Home once more."

The little party gathered around, and looked onwards in the direction indicated. Before them, beautiful as a dream, and majestic as ever—yet inconceivably more majestic than ever in the eyes of the returning Wanderer—the graceful turrets of the Father's mansion rose out of its embosoming woods and gardens. In the distant west, the daylight had just died away, and only here and there, on the far horizon, a fleck of crimson clouds betrayed the hiding-place of the buried sun. But sleep had not yet taken possession of the stately abode on which they looked. From its multitudinous windows flashed the brightness of

innumerable lights, and out of the old recollections Inconstant at once recognised apartment after apartment.

"Is it far?" he asked, longingly, and yet hardly believing what he saw: "and shall we not soon be there?"

"It is not far, my master," replied Watchful, "and yet I would detain thee here awhile. These two friends of thine shall go forward and announce thy return. But stay thou here awhile and behold that which I have yet to shew thee, before my task is done."

Even as he spoke, the features of Watchful began to gleam with a light like the light of stars. His locks unfolded, and fell in bright and glowing tresses around his countenance, until they seemed as it were a living crown. His dress changed from that of the peasant, whom hitherto Inconstant had taken him to be, and he stood revealed in all the loveliness of true celestial garments. Then Inconstant knew him for an angel, and, looking back through the memories of the past, he began to understand somewhat of the Divine love which had followed him so long.

CHAP. XXIV.

THE RETURN.

"Come," said the angel, "and I will shew thee that which is to be hereafter."

Mr. Gospeller and Conscience had departed. Inconstant stood on the platform edge Zionwards, and, clasping his hand still, the child Faith stood beside him. With the staff that was in his hand, the angel pointed onwards into the distance, from which the daylight had now entirely departed. A mist and darkness seemed to pass over the scene and obscure it for some short time. The turrets and buttresses of the Father's mansion, its clustered woods and variegated garden-slopes, its lighted windows and traceried spires, disappeared from sight. Then slowly clearing away, the mist again parted, and Inconstant found himself looking down once more upon the City of Earthly-Delight. The Temple of Self was there as of old, glorious with innumerable mirrored pinnacles; the gaily decked streets were there, the bright pleasure-grounds around the city, and the glowing amber river encircling all.

"I thought the city had been destroyed ere now," said Inconstant.

"It would have been, but for the goodness of the Master of Zion Towers," replied the angel. "When they cried unto Him, He heard them, and delivered them from the hand of their enemy. Alas! when that enemy was departed, they gave themselves again to their former ways, built up in fuller grandeur that which had been destroyed, denied the authority and claims of Him to whom they owed their deliverance, and worshipped Self once more, even with a more earnest zeal than they had ever done beforetime."

"And do they prosper still?" enquired Inconstant, hesitatingly.

"I show thee things to come," replied the angel. "Look more closely. The city itself seems even as it was. But hast thou noticed any change in the river?"

Inconstant looked more narrowly at the stream.

"It seems higher than of old," said he at last. "The banks seem more lofty, and the nearness of the waters more threatening."

"Thy judgment is just," said the angel. "And even as we speak, the time rolls on, and the waters rise. Again I show thee things to come."

As he spoke the words, that which had so often been spoken of, so often dreaded, and so often averted as at length to be regarded as impossible, now at last befell. The burning river burst its banks, and swept over the plains of the city of Earthly-Delight with inconceivable rapidity and

force. Beneath the onset of the fiery flood, the city walls hardly stood for a moment; the splendid edifices and wealthy mansions which crowded the vast circuit of its fortifications disappeared as the sand which is thrown upon molten iron; the pleasant gardens and delightful suburbs were in a few moments undistinguishable from the town which they had surrounded. From the foot of the hill on which the spectators stood, far away into the horizon, a sea of liquid fire rolled its resistless waves. Inconstant turned away in horror.

"Alas! Alas!" he cried, "and must this be the end of so fair a city?"

"The end," replied the angel solemnly. "These shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

"But not so with all the scenes I have passed through?" said Inconstant, shuddering at the sight before them. "Thou hast shown me the fate of Earthly-Delight. What of Mansmerit?"

Once more the angel waved his staff, and darkness obscured the scene. When it rolled away, Inconstant saw before him the bleak downs and rugged hills whereon the town had been; but the town itself was gone.

"It lived its day," said the angel. "It was a town of Lies, and nothing but the Truth can last. It was a town of the earth, and when the riches of the earth had departed, it departed also. The wicked shall not stand in the judgment. Thou shalt look for his place, and lo! it is no more."

Inconstant hid his face and wept. When he uncovered his eyes again, the scene had again changed, and once more he beheld in front of him the mansion of his Father. The angel had vanished, but Faith was still at his side, and close at hand he heard the returning voices of Mr. Gospeller and his faithful servant Conscience.

"Thou hast no need to fear," cried Gospeller, advancing. "Thy coming is already known. While thou wast a great way off thy Father saw thee: and behold! He Himself now comes forth to meet thee."

The Wanderer trembled from head to foot, and for an instant almost feared to advance. But again Mr. Gospeller reassured him.

"Him that cometh unto me, says the blessed Book, I will in no wise cast out. Call to mind the words which thou didst so lately determine to use. Be not afraid to use them now."

"What words?" asked Inconstant.

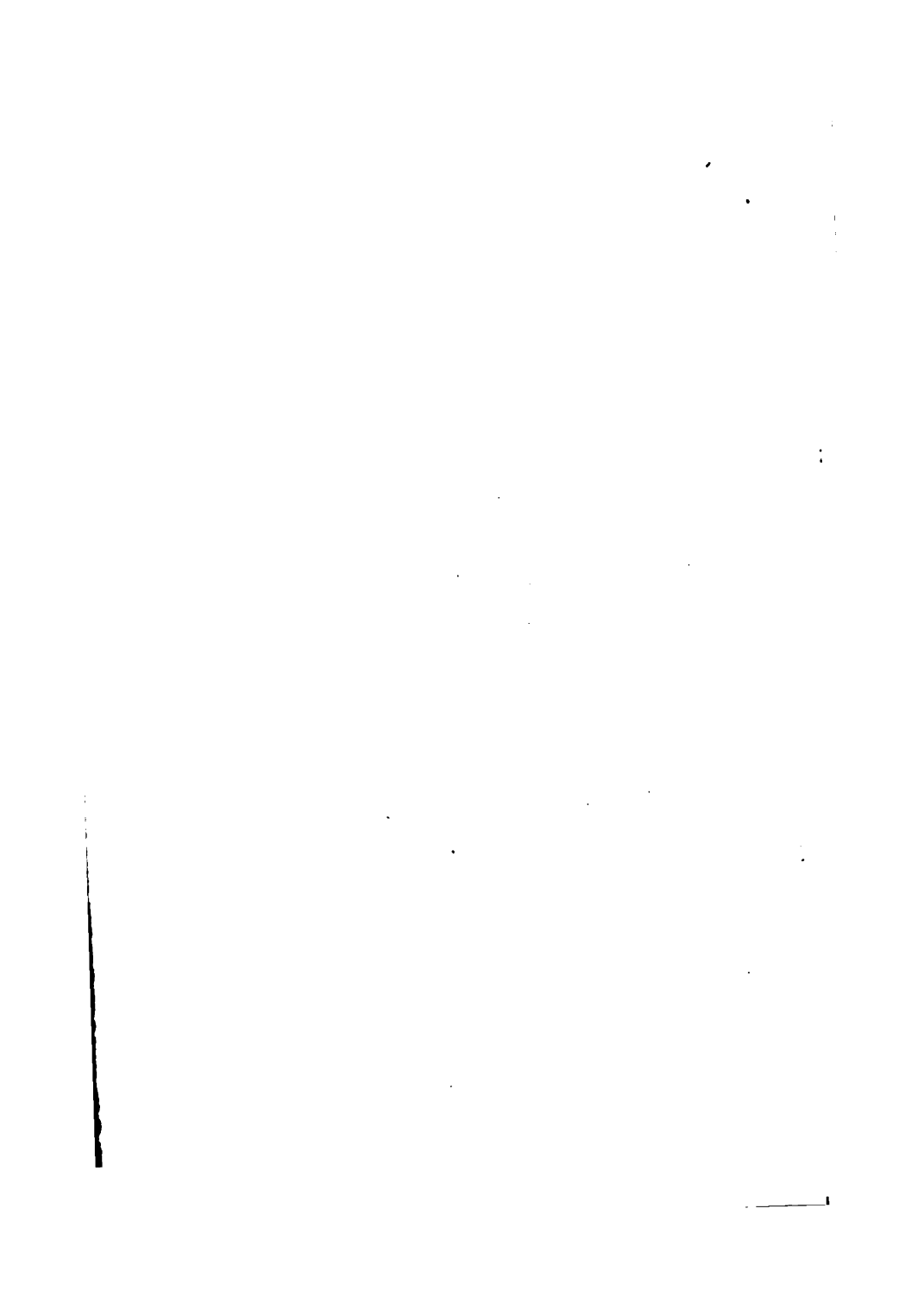
"Can'st thou forget them? Were they not, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son?"

"I remember," replied Inconstant, "and I will use them."

So saying, he stepped from the summit of the hill, and passed swiftly down the wooded slopes towards his home. Mr. Gospeller stood behind on the summit, and watched him as he went, but Faith and Conscience were close beside him.



COMING HOME.



Now the Mountains of Grace, bleak and desolate as they are on the sides of the Far Country, are most lovely and glorious with evergreen forests, and with every choice and beautiful tree, on the side which lies towards Zion Towers. Through these shadowing woods, therefore, the wanderer at first passed, but not for long. The belt of trees which skirts the hill Calvary soon ends, being fringed by a tiny stream, which forms the boundary of the home domain.

"Conscience," faltered Inconstant, as they reached the borders of this stream, and, leaving the shelter of the woods, came out into a clear space upon its banks, "this stream is the boundary of our own precincts. I recognise it."

"It is so, dear master," replied Conscience, "and once having passed its waters, thou shalt be at home once more."

"But thinkest thou truly, dear Conscience," continued the returning prodigal, "that I shall not be refused admittance?"

"No, no," replied Faith, taking up the answer, and clinging faster to Inconstant's hand; "a thousand thousand times, no. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So saying, the child led the still half-reluctant but unresisting man through the little stream, and up the bank beyond.

As they ascended the bank Inconstant saw that they had come from the mansion to meet him, and that his return was to be no secret one. A fuller glory gleamed from the windows, and now opened doors. Many lights swayed hither and thither in the surrounding gardens, carried by coming groups of welcomers. The mansion itself was now not so far, but that he could hear the sound of music and commencing festival. But neither of the crowd of servants and friends thus drawn together to receive him, nor of the sounds and sights of rejoicing, nor of the unwonted splendour and luxury which all around him disclosed,—of none of these did the Wanderer take heed or note. That alone of which he was conscious was, that his Father's arms were round him, that his Father's kiss was on his cheek, and that it was the very voice of his Father which he heard once more. Ah! blessed words of the Divine and Eternal voice, meet and refreshing for all returning sinners to hear! "This my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found!"

THE END.

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